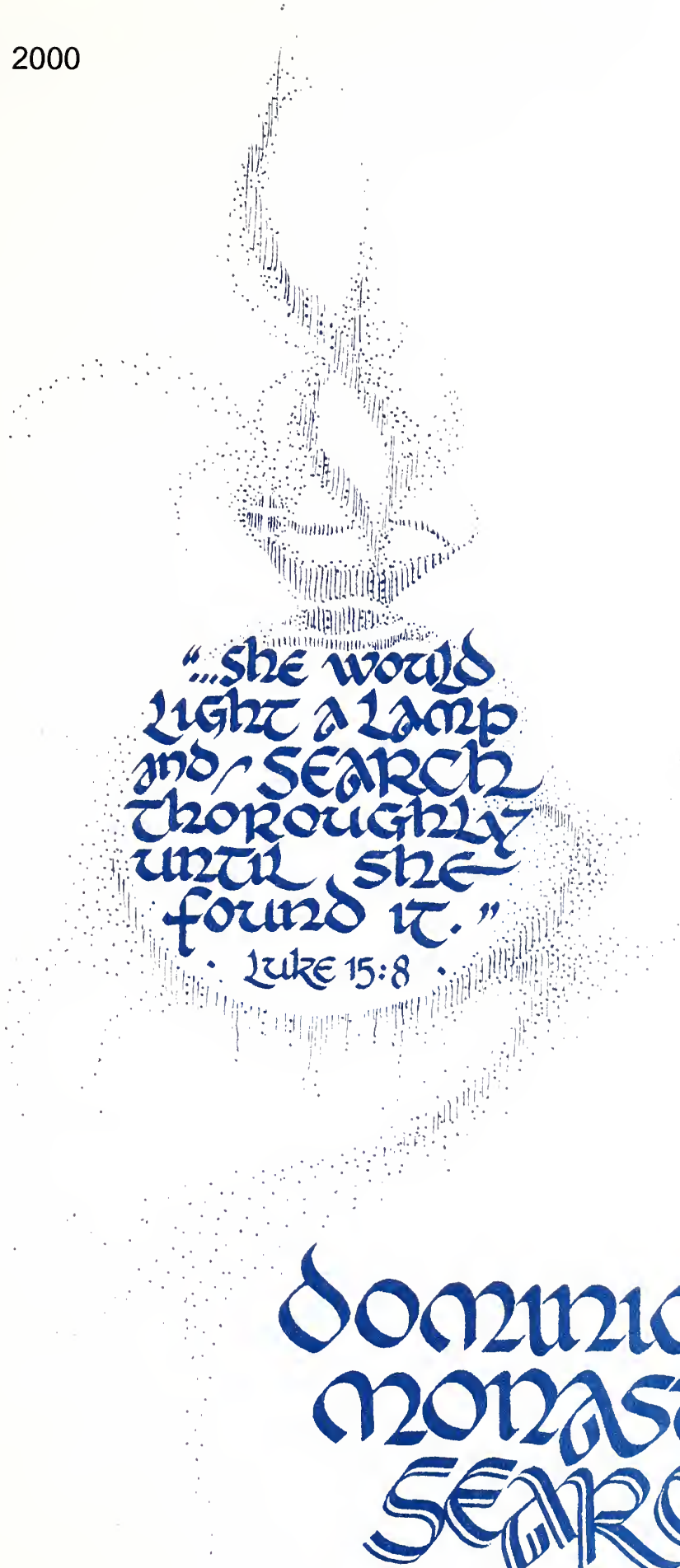



VOLUME 19, 2000



"...she would  
light a lamp  
and SEARCH  
thoroughly  
until she  
found it."

• Luke 15:8 •

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# DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH



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## DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH

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*Dominican Monastic Search* is published by the Conference of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers of the United States of America. The Conference is an organization of independent monasteries whose purpose is to foster the monastic contemplative life of the nuns in the spirit of Saint Dominic.

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*Dominican Monastic Search* is a spiritual and theological review written by the nuns. Its purpose is to foster the Dominican monastic contemplative life by the sharing of insights gained from study and prayer. It is published once a year as a service to the nuns of the Conference. It is also available to the wider Dominican Family and others upon request. A donation of \$8.00 to aid in the cost of printing would be appreciated, when possible, from non-Conference members.

*Dominican Monastic Search* welcomes all its readers to contribute articles for publication. We ask that manuscripts be prepared with concern for literary and intellectual quality. Appropriate subjects include scripture, theology, philosophy, spirituality, Dominican life, and the liberal arts insofar as they contribute to our Dominican vocation. Serious poetry reflective of these categories may also be submitted, though only a small amount can be used. A theme for each issue of *DMS* is usually announced in advance, but is not intended to limit the scope of articles. Before submitting a manuscript, please refer to the page of guidelines at the end of the most recent issue of *Dominican Monastic Search*.

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DWELLING  
IN THE  
INMOST LIFE  
OF GOD

CONFERENCE OF NUNS  
OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS  
USA



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Page 88: *Coronation of the Virgin*, Fresco by Fra Angelico

## EDITORIAL

This volume of *Dominican Monastic Search* features the talks from Assembly 2000, a gathering doubly historic for having taken place in both the great Jubilee year, and the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year of the inauguration of the Conference of Nuns of the Order of Friars Preachers of the USA.

This Assembly most appropriately drew its theme: "Dwelling in the Inmost Life of God," from Pope John Paul's Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. Our vocation as Dominican Nuns calls us to direct the whole of our lives to realizing the mystery of divine communion opened to us by the event of the Incarnation of the Son of God which this Jubilee celebrates.

Each presentation from the Assembly reflects theologically on some aspect of traditional Dominican Observance, seeking clearer perspectives and expressions for how to strive toward this goal of communion with the Trinity as we move forward into the Third Millennium.

I found it curiously graced how the other papers submitted proved so complementary to the reflections from the Assembly. In Part II of this issue we see Mary as ever with us on this journey, both as beauty attracting our contemplation, and as a gracious guide familiar with the way, because she has walked it before us unto its end in glory. Our eager longing for this goal keeps it in view and like a wellspring from which we drink, invigorates our daily efforts. By our very creation God has placed a "primal memory" within us, to sustain our desire. For the Father loved us so much as to empower us with hope that we shall dwell in him, just by calling us into being. If we experience a sense of loss for a time, as Magdalen did after the crucifixion of her beloved Jesus, it is only that we may see him again, and even more clearly.

With this issue we also bring to completion our three-part series of the Commentary on the Constitutions.

*DMS* itself is passing milestone, as Sr. Judith Miryam (Summit, NJ) has accepted the editorship for the coming term. We have confidence that, well supported by your interest and cooperation, she will continue to make our journal one of quality, interest and value for our Dominican contemplative and monastic life, and that her "tour of duty" will be as rewarding as mine has been.

Sr. Mary Dominic, O.P.  
Elmira, NY  
Editor





# THE MYSTERY OF DIVINE COMMUNION AND THE DOMINICAN MONASTIC LIFE<sup>1</sup>

Fr. Augustine DiNoia, O.P.  
Province of St. Joseph

## INTRODUCTION: "Free for God alone" (LCM I:1)

### a. adopting the "divine perspective"

The topic is the one which was assigned to me: "The Mystery of Divine Communion and the Monastic Life." I take as mine these words of John Paul II: "Everything is reduced to the essential because the only thing that matters is communion with God." Let me speak a moment about the perspective I am adopting here, so that you will see how the parts of the presentation connect with each other.

I recently gave a lecture in Steubenville, Ohio, on a topic which I had addressed before but never so extensively: "The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist." In the course of preparing for it, I read something by Msgr. Robert Sokolowski. He has a remarkable book on the Eucharist; but this was just a short essay in *Communio*. It encouraged me to say to them what I am going to say now to you, because I think that it captures the way we approach things: by "adopting a divine perspective."

When having a disagreement with somebody, we sometimes say: "Would you look at this from my point of view?" Suppose that we imagine God saying to us in our various quandaries ( e.g., in that other talk I was thinking of the Real Presence): "Would you look at this from My point of view?"

Now this is a rather daring thing to do. It seems to some to characterize our theology as being a little bit too grand. But of course Aquinas taught us, and St. Dominic taught us, that this is the only way to work things out. Robert Jenson, a Lutheran theologian whom I respect very much, says in his *Systematic Theology*: "The doctrine of the Trinity is not a puzzle to be solved; it is itself the solution to all the other puzzles." Now this is a very powerful remark, and in part is another way of saying: "Look at this from My point of view." And if we "look at this from My point of view," taking, for example, the Real Presence, we are preoccupied with the issue: How can this be? How can Christ be present, bodily, in those elements; and so much so that Aquinas has taught us they no longer exist, and the Church teaches this as transubstantiation. "How can this be?" we say. But if you take the divine perspective, the question becomes: "Why not? Why not?"

So let us now think to ourselves that we are standing looking at what God has done from God's perspective, from the perspective of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are going to try to see how the things that God has done make sense – to God! This is daring. It is not a demonstration; Aquinas taught us this. We have no *demonstratio propter quid* in the things of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Ed. note: This talk was transcribed from the tape, and reviewed by Father DiNoia.

We are not God. But nonetheless God invites us. We believe that faith is a participation in the divine knowledge. We can't say: things had to be this way; there had to be Creation, Incarnation, Eucharist. But we can see, if we adopt God's perspective, why it makes sense that there is Creation, Incarnation and Eucharist. To be honest with you, we have no alternative way of viewing these things. Although some have been proposed, they are unstable, for one reason or another, and tend to erode, whereas this one remains. That is part of the reason why the place of Aquinas is so extraordinary in the Church: this one remains and keeps reviving. Even when everybody has declared it to be dead and gone, it comes back, as it is now.

Because of the nature of the topic, we are chiefly looking at spirituality. This is not simply the study of the Trinity as a theological doctrine of considerable complexity and interest; that would be an entirely other lecture. This is a lecture about what the doctrine of the Trinity means for us, and particularly for Dominican contemplatives – which includes all of us, not just the nuns but also the friars.

### **b. The centrality of “*veritas*” in the Dominican life: spirituality rooted in theology**

The centrality of *veritas* is a very strong element; seen everywhere in writings on our spirituality. That *Veritas* is the motto of the Order is very clear throughout our history. In my preparation for this talk, something providentially came into my hands: the article on Dominican spirituality in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, which Benedict Ashley translated, with permission of the publishers, and put on a website. I found it extremely helpful. Written by several authors, it is uneven; but it is very useful because it contains a lot of bibliography, and the names of many very interesting nuns who had written their autobiographies. Not all are published, some of them are in archives. To see all this is fascinating. Many of the things I have to say came to me from reading this article.

One of the things that struck me is how much throughout our history, in a spirituality rooted in theology, the friars and the nuns were concerned to avoid the fantastical in spirituality and to keep coming back to the central matters of our faith. Partly this is because it is both fundamental to us and fundamental to the medieval and patristic conception of life that human beings are not the judges of reality, nor the constructors of it; they are the receivers of something: Truth. There is an objective order to which we must conform. We do not make that order conform to us. This will help us to understand later why [medieval] conventual and monastic forms of life are different from the ones that emerged in the last four hundred years.

### **c. Jubilee call to communion with the Blessed Trinity**

Finally, the reason for the theme of this Assembly 2000 is, as you know, that our Holy Father in a most remarkable way has made the Trinity the center of reflection, both of the preparation for the Jubilee and of its celebration. So the topic is very appropriate.

### **1. Trinitarian communion and the universal call to holiness**

Cardinal Hickey said to me one day at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception: “They have just put up a new bas-relief.” As you go out of the Basilica, above the doors there is an immense marble work: the Blessed Virgin, and people moving towards the center. It is titled: “The Universal Call to Holiness.” It was his idea. As we were standing looking up at it, I said: “That was a great idea, your Eminence.” And he said: “Gus, I got this



idea from the Dominicans. The Dominicans have always taught that holiness is not something for just a small number of people." One of the great themes of John Paul II is not to have made awful divisions between moral theology, ascetical theology, spiritual theology, mystical theology. Those distinctions have a use, but in practice they have divided the Church more or less into two groups: the people seeking the perfection of union with God – and everybody else. This is a terrible mistake because everybody is called to share the communion of life of the Trinity. So what we are describing here, although we are talking about it in a particular way relating to the Order, is not just for us. And we have never taught that it was just for us.

#### **a. The harmonious life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

This phrase "the harmonious life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," is another expression I borrowed from Robert Jenson. But he borrowed it from Jonathan Edwards, so this is very American! Jonathan Edwards wrote about the Trinity using musical analogies, interestingly, and Jenson does also.

But "the harmonious life" of Father, Son and Holy Spirit was in no need of complementing by anything else. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not need the company of anyone else. They are their own company, and their own company is sufficient for them. It is terribly important to start here. Not even to start with Creation or – God forbid! – to start with ourselves. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit did not need company. As St. Irenaeus says: "God who was in need of no one, gave communion with Himself to those who need him." This is a deep mystery: that there is anything besides God! Even here, as Aquinas teaches us: that there is anything besides God doesn't mean there is more. Because God by creating did not "increase the volume" of existence. He shared *his* existence. It is an odd thing to think of. In a way, you cannot say "before God created anything else" because everything else is, comes into existence, out of God's perfect act. As Aquinas says: *ipsum esse per se subsistens* causes the existence of everything else, and yet without adding.

#### **b. Creation as the basis for divine communion with non-divine persons**

We don't cry "mystery" too soon, but we have to cry it here. We say "love" – but that God should have this intention, that the Trinity, would share life and therefore communion with what is not God, is a mystery. When I say: "You have to adopt the divine perspective," this is where you have to start, with this intention of God to share the communion of Trinitarian life with persons who are not God: the angels, and us, and any other persons there are in the universe. We may be the only persons in the universe. But if there are others, they are included in this.

Creation – that the world exists, that there is a universe, that there are stars and planets, moon, and earth and people on it – none of this would exist apart from the divine intention to share the communion of Trinitarian life with what is not God. Nothing would exist. When you say, or when you hear people say: "What is the meaning of life?" this is the answer. I have not heard another one that is very persuasive. Buddhism has an appealing explanation of a continuous sort of recycling of everything in the universe; but in the end, it's impersonal.

So creation is the basis for divine communion with non-divine persons. We came into existence for this, and nothing less. We can't settle for less. How does this occur in God's plan? (We are thinking the way God thinks, dare we?) If God intends to share the communion of Trinitarian life with what is not God, he has to make some of those, and he has to make a place for them.

So creation flows from this intention. God is not like us. We sit around saying: I wish I knew French, or I wish I knew this or I wish I knew that, and do nothing. When God wants something, it happens. God doesn't have unfulfilled wishes. So, given the intention to have company that is not God, it follows that God has to make company for himself that is not God. And here, I dare say, it follows that if God is going to have personal relationship with bodily persons, it makes sense for him to have come in the flesh in the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, because we find it hard to deal with God as just a pure spirit. It is hard to have a personal relationship with a pure spirit.

I don't know how you are doing with your guardian angels. Almost everybody imagines them as bodily beings. Angels are spirits who inhabit bodies, but we know from Aquinas that their bodies are not essential to their identity in the way that our bodies are. They can occupy any body any time, presumably. We cannot. (That is why the doctrine of reincarnation is, from a Christian point of view, absurd.) But it's hard to have a relationship with a pure spirit, so you have to imagine pure spirits having bodies. The angel Gabriel came to Mary in bodily form. For a time, he, she, or it, occupied a body in order to appear before the Blessed Virgin. We are bodily persons, we like to touch, we like to kiss, we like to hear, talk, shake hands. That is the way bodily persons operate. We like to be able to see a person. When I adopt the divine perspective – do I say that God *had* to send his Son in the flesh? No! Of course not. But that he did, Aquinas would say, makes sense. *Ex convenientia* – it is appropriate that God should act in this way.

So our communion with the Blessed Trinity is made possible through the Incarnation, first of all, and then, because of sin, through the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. We have two obstacles to being in God's company: we aren't God; and we are not holy. And God overcomes both of them in Christ. Pay attention in Advent. The beautiful readings, the antiphons, are all about this: how Christ became one of us so that we might become like God.

### **c. Communion with the Blessed Trinity through adoptive participation in Christ**

The mystery of the Incarnation is the mystery of the elevation of human nature. John Paul II has talked rather radically about this idea that the Incarnation has changed every human being. He has really emphasized this. What Aquinas and the tradition call *gratia elevans*, that we are enabled to be in the company of God and not feel out of place or ill at ease: that is what Christ has done for us. Our relationship with Christ is a relationship which is with God; not an intermediary. And my language here of "adoptive participation" is Paul's: by adoption we become brothers and sisters of Christ and therefore sons and daughters of the Father. The one who is Son by nature makes us children of God by adoption: one by one, as it were. No more just being the children of Adam; that doesn't work. The difference between the state we are in now and the state Adam and Eve were in before sin is this: that being in a relationship with God was part of just being human. That is no longer true. Original sin is the disruption of that possibility of transmitting, with human nature, a relationship with God. So Christ is the new Adam, who claims the descendants of Adam as his. His! One by one. If you have been to a baptism in the new rite, the Sign of the Cross is made on the forehead of the child by the priest, by the parents, and by the godfather and godmother. "We claim you for Christ," they say. That's what I mean by "one by one." It's not just being human any more; it's being claimed one by one in Christ.

The new document which has caused such a furor, *Dominus Jesus*, is merely stating the most lapidary point about the faith. This is the point: no one has ever claimed to be able to make human beings intimately related to God. No one, not Mohammed and not even Moses. Judaism and Islam disagree with us at this central point – about human beings being intimately related with God. Christians claim, (and this, hopefully, is still shared by all of the churches that subscribe to the Nicene Creed), that no deeper intimacy with God is possible than the intimacy with God which we are promised, and indeed now share, through Christ, with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Short of making other gods, which God can't do, God could not bring us into any deeper intimacy than the one in which we are sharing now. This is not something that is just going to be in the future. We already are in this state. Baptism is the introduction of us into the state of being in communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is what Christ claims us for – one by one – and each of us then has to be transformed into his image. This is why we pray that the Father "will see and love in us what he sees and loves in Christ."

Recall the parable of the wedding banquet to which no one comes, and the king sends his servants to get people from the highways and by-ways. He looks out at the result and finds one without the wedding garment. We say: "The poor guy didn't know he was going to a wedding; how could he get in trouble for not having a wedding garment? He didn't have time to go to Bloomingdale's!" But of course we have to understand here that the practice of the ancient Near East was often that wedding garments were supplied (as when we go to a parish and there are albs in the closet). And in any case, to appear without one was a profound breach of etiquette. So he gets thrown out into the street. But what is that? I think you have to interpret the parable in the Pauline sense: the Father looks out and wants to see us clothed in Christ. The ones who are not clothed in Christ will not feel at home nor be at home. And this transformation is one which does not suppress our personalities or our humanness but consummates them.

The deep point of all Christian anthropology, which has been emphasized very much by John Paul II in his encyclicals, is that Christ makes it possible for us to be most fully ourselves. And short of transformation in him, we will never realize the full humanity that each one of us is. The image of God in us, by being transformed in the image of Christ, becomes more and more refined and sharpened. We become more and more ourselves, not less and less ourselves, by being transformed in Christ. This is an essential point of the themes of this week. I know Fr. Corbett will pick up on this, because what we call "the moral life," and the observances, are meant to assist in this transformation; that is where they belong. Neither observances nor the moral life are for their own sake. They are for the sake of a transformation directed towards personal union. And that is what Christ does. That is the whole beginning, really, of moral theology, and in fact its summary. *The New Catechism*, Part III: "The Life in Christ," is all about this.

## **2. The Trinitarian communion**

### **a. The Trinitarian pattern of redemption**

The doctrine of the Trinity that we now know was worked out over several hundred years of struggle, and if you read the Fathers, you have to know a lot of metaphysics to figure out what they are talking about. It's complicated. That is why the doctrine of the Trinity has gotten the reputation of being a puzzle – which is most unfortunate because what the Fathers were trying to do was to secure the doctrine against alternatives which undermined the possibility of



communion. But it was hard to do that, and not everybody has to become a specialist in that. But *everybody* knows this: the Father does not take origin. The order in the Trinity is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and you cannot go any other way. You cannot start with the Spirit, or the Son – you can't move those pieces around. One of the problems with Trinitarian theology and the Enlightenment, especially following Hegel, was that Trinitarian theology sometimes made the Spirit primary, and this undermines the processions.

As the Fathers of the Church say, the Father is without origin. The Son proceeds from the Father. And yet without being caused in being. It's a deep mystery. This is the deepest mystery. You cannot use any words like "The Father causes the Son." The Son *proceeds*. We learn this from John: "I came from the Father." The word "proceeds," for Aquinas, is a biblical word, not a technical word. (*Processio* is from the Latin in the Vulgate.) So the Son proceeds from the Father. And we say – in theology, not doctrine – that it is the Father's knowing of himself, or his divinity, that generates the Son. And then we say, doctrinally, that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. And the theology of the Church has favored the view that this is, as Aquinas says, from the *impulsus amoris*: the dynamic of love in God gives forth the Holy Spirit. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Order. Order without differentiation in being. Taking of origin without inequality in being. But how can this be?

### ***Missions of the Son and the Spirit: temporal prolongation of the processions***

Now, the economy of salvation is, to use Aquinas's language somewhat, the temporal prolongation of the processions. The Father sends the Son. The Father cannot be sent. Aquinas says that the mission of the Son is the prolongation of the procession of generation. This is very hard both to conceive and to explain. Time is changed, not God. Time is changed, we are changed, because the Son is sent. The sending of the Son is not, as Aquinas says, the occupation of a new location by the Son because God cannot come to be in a place where he already is – except in a different way. But if it's in a different way, it has to be because the difference is in the creature, not in God. So we are present to the Son, the human race is present to the Son, in a new way in the mission of the Son. The Father and the Son send the Spirit. In the whole season between Ascension and Pentecost there are hundreds of passages in the Scriptures that make this point. Now, Aquinas teaches us that the work of Redemption – this is a wonderful thought! – is the reverse.

### ***The Spirit transforms us in the image of the Son who is loved by the Father***

The Spirit now does the work of transforming us in the image of the Son who then is loved by the Father. Whereas in the Trinity the order is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in us the order is: Spirit, Son, Father. Remarkable! So the whole economy of salvation is shaped according to a trinitarian pattern: the sending and the return. I am going to talk a little about this sending and return in the section on the Eucharist. The movement is a trinitarian movement. This is in Aquinas, but you don't find too many Western theologians talking this way, unfortunately. The Eastern theologians do habitually talk this way. They always understood this. But in the West the doctrine of the Trinity practically became unimportant in some Christian circles. Schliermacher put the doctrine of the Trinity in the *appendix* to his *The Christian Faith*!

There's a big debate about whether or not in the twentieth century the doctrine of the Trinity can truly be said to have been recovered; for, as some people say, how could it ever have been forgotten? In any case, one thing is true about twentieth-century theology: twentieth-century

theologians, Catholic and non-Catholic – famously, Karl Rahner and Karl Barth – made the Trinity central to their theology. Whether it was a recovery or not, let the historians argue. But it certainly has become a new emphasis, and comes really to its apogee in the extraordinary preparation for the Jubilee that we have in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*.

#### **b. The trinitarian structure of ecclesial communion**

We often think of "pattern" and "structure" as similar, but they are different. "Pattern" is how something works out. "Structure" is something underlying, as in "the trinitarian structure of ecclesial communion."

#### ***The recovery of the notion of communio in recent ecclesiology***

The recovery of the notion of *communio* in recent ecclesiology is a very important thing. Vatican II left ecclesiology somewhat in the danger of incoherence. Not that Vatican II made a mistake; it was rich in its discussion of what the Church is, in *Lumen Gentium*. So we have "People of God," we have "Body of Christ," we have "Sacrament" – all those conceptions of what the Church is. But lately it has been recognized that the concept of *communio*, or communion, works very well at integrating all the rest of those concepts, and increasingly one sees ecclesiology being written with the idea of *communio*. (Many people feel we have to use the Latin word because "communion" is confusing to a lot of people – they think: "Holy Communion." Actually the uses are very close).

Avery Dulles repents that he ever wrote *Models of the Church* in the way that he did. Great harm was done by that book in its popular form, because people began to say: "You have an institutional model of the Church; my model is – blank, blank." Avery rewrote the book, and I haven't read the revision, but I think it's one of those things – the cat is out of the bag and you will never get it back in again. It is a tremendous struggle to try and get people to understand that you cannot think of the Church in that sort of incoherent way. It's not a question of what you think the Church is. The question is: "What is it?"

#### ***Ecclesial communion rooted in trinitarian communion***

*Communio* seems to be, so far, the most successful concept for organizing ecclesiology and all these other so-called "models," or metaphors, or concepts, or notions, of the Church. What it means is simply this: at its root, ecclesial communion is the external, the visible, manifestation of the communion we have with the Blessed Trinity, in the Holy Spirit. To the Holy Spirit is attributed, ascribed, this special work. The mission of the Holy Spirit is to do this.

What the concept of *communio* does *not* mean is that the Church is a federation of particular churches. It does not mean that, because communion in the Holy Spirit pre-dates any churches. The communion is already constituted by the first Church, sitting in the Upper Room, in Pentecost. We say that is the birth of the Church. And that Church did not have dioceses yet! There were no particular churches; there was only *the* Church gathered in Jerusalem. There were eventually going to be churches everywhere else; but not yet. So you might say: the ecclesial *communio* is both temporally and logically prior to the Church spread out.

The same theme relates to the issue of the theology of the papacy. As you know, towards the end of *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II invited people to reflect on how the primacy might be

exercised in this new period. Well, everybody has a proposal! But what has happened is that the discussion has concentrated on the theology of the papal primacy. As you see, most of the titles of the articles and books are on papal primacy. But primacy is an ecclesiastical concept. That is, Sees have primacy. Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome. And then there were others. There is the Primate of Spain. And the Primate of Ireland. (And in Ireland they have two, because there is the "Primate of all Ireland," and the "Primate of Ireland"! ) So you see how the word "Primate" loses significance when you recognize the number of ways it is used. The point is: Peter ended up in Rome. And it made sense: Rome was the center of the world. Peter was Bishop of Rome and Rome became important because Peter was there. The theology has to concentrate, not on the primacy of the person sitting in the See of Rome, but on the *munus petrinum*, what it *means* to be Head of the Church.

Similarly with the college of bishops. The *collegium episcoporum*, the successors of the Apostles, were successors of the twelve men who were Apostles before they were bishops or heads of Sees. This is a remarkable point which must be remembered. A priest-friend often said to me for similar reasons, "We need a theology of the Apostles," – because being an Apostle is not just being the head of a church. That happened eventually. But there is something prior. These analogies help to understand what it means to say that the Church, the ecclesial communion, is a universal communion that is grounded in the communion we have with the Blessed Trinity now, in Baptism, and which will be consummated in the life to come.

### **3. The trinitarian pattern of redemption and the traditional foci of Dominican devotion**

According to the article I referred to, there has been a dispute whether there *is* such a thing as Dominican spirituality. Because our spirituality is so universal to the Church, it is hard to distinguish our themes. You look at this point and say: "Well, everybody has these foci." It's a topic that is hard to know what to do with, but the point is that in our tradition, these elements of devotion that I name have always been central. Not *only* these, but these chiefly. I suggest to you that they relate very much to the trinitarian pattern. In their depths they can be seen as a trinitarian pattern. The doctrine of the Trinity is explicit in some of our mystics and writers, but it is implicit in all of them. And in so far as Aquinas is the teacher of all of the spiritual writers, it is always in there somehow.

#### **a. The Infancy of Christ: Annunciation and Incarnation**

Devotion to the infancy of Christ was significant for a lot of our saints and mystics. Here are the two mysteries of the Annunciation and the Incarnation. We absorb from the Dominican atmosphere our way of looking at things from the divine point of view. And from the divine point of view, it makes sense for our devotion to light on the big moments. It is not that anybody ever set out to do it; we had an instinct for it.

The Annunciation has always been regarded as one of the great feasts of the Order. Why? Why not the Immaculate Conception? This is not easy to figure out. The Immaculate Conception certainly had its champions in the Order, and that's a complicated story. Only when Dominican theologians were convinced that you had to attribute the sinlessness of Mary to the foreseen merits of Christ's Passion, were they willing to go with it. You see, there was a problem with some of the Franciscan ways of putting it: sinlessness was seen as one of the possibilities out there; and it was Mary who got it. But we insisted that there is no sinlessness



any more; sin is removed from us and she was preserved from it, by Christ. It is not that there was this open possibility that somebody might be born sinless.

But the Annunciation and the Incarnation are, in many ways, our spirituality. Though we see a lot of the Passion, there is also a lot of Advent. Our spirituality is very much oriented toward the mystery of the Incarnation and the grace that it is – the complete unreadiness of the human race for this: that Christ would come in the form of a baby, that God would be an infant. It is a remarkable thing! The point I am trying to make in this whole discussion is both to understand that the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is the object of our love, and also to understand the movement of the way in which we Dominicans think, that is, how everything relates to the Trinity.

### **b. The Passion of Christ**

Devotion to the Passion of Christ – this is big for us! It goes back to St. Dominic himself clearly, and it is to be found in almost every one of the great saints of the Order. We see again this sense of attaching devotion to things absolutely central to the faith, rather than marginal to it. So devotion here is attached to the mystery of the coming of Christ and then naturally to the mystery of his Passion. This is not gloominess. There is a certain realism about sin here but there is a celebration of the paschal mystery as transformative. You know this, if you've read St. Catherine de Ricci's *The Valiant Combat*. Catherine de Ricci, St. Catherine of Siena: they are not gloomy people. Their devotion to the Passion was a devotion to the central mystery of the faith: that Christ saves us. And that is not something different from the Trinity.

These moments in the history of salvation are not apart from the Trinity. Some theologians say they are the working out – the enactment of – trinitarian identity. But that is too extreme. (This is a very important point to remember, especially for your reading.) Robert Jenson is one of the theologians who seem to talk as if the pattern of redemption – that is, the Incarnation, Redemption, and giving of the Holy Spirit – is almost necessary for God to be God. That is what I mean by "the enactment of the triune identity." In fact, Jensen's book is called *The Triune Identity*. What he means is that for God to be the God he is, he had to be *Incarnate and the Spirit who gathers the Church*. But that seems to make it necessary for God to have *shared* the communion of Trinitarian life – which goes against a whole lot in the tradition. There is an interesting debate going on right now for people who are interested in trinitarian theology. But certainly if people are going *that far*, you can see why one would have to say that to speak about the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery and the gift of the Holy Spirit is not something apart from the trinitarian life. We must think in the context of this trinitarian pattern, and I believe the Order has always done so, by instinct – centering on these mysteries. Perhaps that is why people have said ours is a universal spirituality: these are mysteries of the Christian faith. They are not our property, but it is typical of our tradition, our spiritual tradition, to have fixed on these mysteries as central.

### **c. The Eucharist**

I learned from Benedict Ashley's article I referred to earlier, that some German Dominicans in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries were leaders of a movement for frequent Communion. And because of that, because of their preaching, their bishops within a very short time adopted the practice of more frequent Communion. Here again you see the divine perspective: for Aquinas the mystery of the Eucharist is not a "how can this be?" but a "why not?" When you adopt the

trinitarian perspective as we have been doing here, Creation, Incarnation (always including, in the Incarnation, the Passion), Eucharist – they make sense.

Aquinas said in the *Tertia Pars* (III, 75, a.1): "It is a law of friendship that friends should live together. Christ has not left us without his bodily presence on our pilgrimage, but he joins us to himself in this sacrament, in the reality of his body and blood." That's a good example of what I mean by "taking the divine perspective." The Incarnate One doesn't go away, and say "So long, guys, good luck!" He sticks around. Bodily. That is what Aquinas means: he sticks around. And truly Aquinas is the greatest theologian of this mystery ever. Nobody thought about this from more perspectives. He thought it through, better than anybody. (So it makes sense that he should be the author of the great Offices for Corpus Christi).

If you say: "How can this be?" you are adopting the perspective of: "Well, this is matter, and it's wine, and it's bread. And now it is not wine and it is not bread, but it looks like wine and bread. Is it possible?" It is a puzzle. But Aquinas is saying: Well, if you think that God is the Creator of all that is, then, as one of the Fathers said: "God, who created the world, can change the elements." (I think it was Ambrose.) Remarkable! What is this, a problem? For God? We think of these elements as ours, but they are not. God made them. From the divine perspective, given that God is the Creator and that the Son came in the flesh, and that he wants to stick around, we don't say: "How can this be?" "We say: Why not?" It is very important to understand the difference.

### ***Trinity and Eucharist***

I am sure you all own Vaggagini's *Theology of the Liturgy*. It is a great book which I think has been reprinted. This book is still the best, the most complete, treatment of the topic, and you can be led from there to other treatments of it. He has a long section on this topic. He shows how all of the Eucharist is oriented in the trinitarian way, how we pray everything *to* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit. This order, this pattern, that I told you about – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – Holy Spirit, Son, Father – recurs constantly in the liturgy.

In the Eucharist, the Passion-Death-Resurrection of Christ is continually celebrated in the presence of the Father. This is a very important point. This is a celestial liturgy. Here again the East has it over on us. You go into some churches now and you say: "The celestial liturgy? Really, my soul! The last thing to think about is heaven." Whereas in the East, you are thinking about heaven all the time when you go into those smoke-filled churches. I don't mean that we have to adopt their style, but there has to be a recognition here: "Why is this?" This is another one of those situations of "How can this be?"/"Why not?"

From a human perspective, we say: "Well, Christ died once and for all, right? How can "once and for all" be now? How can we participate in something that happened before? And if it happened before, what is it we are doing now? Is it a memorial?" Remember, this is a big debate: What is this? How is the Eucharist a sacrifice? Well, Sokolowski points out that in God, there is no before and after: there is no past. This is important. God isn't sitting up there saying: "Hmm. I remember, back there in Jerusalem, Jesus died on the cross. Oh, and they're reminding me now." No. Before the Father, the death of Christ on the cross is eternally present. It is not a problem that the Mass is the celebration of the sacrifice of Christ. We are being invited into something that is going on independently of us. That is what celestial liturgy means. We are made participants, not in some past event but in something that is present to



God, to the Father. That is a very important way of dealing with this conundrum that has emerged especially since the Reformation, for reasons which are complex. So again: the Trinity and the Eucharist. The way our devotion has focused on the Eucharist makes a lot of sense, and it is something indispensable. It is inconceivable for Dominicans not to be this way!

### ***Adoration: contemplative extension of the eucharistic sacrifice***

I have to stress the importance of Adoration because, as much as it is being revived, it's also under what I think is diabolical attack. Aquinas says that the reason we expose Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is not so that he can become more present to us but so that we can become more present to him. A very interesting point, because Christ is not more present on the altar than he was behind the door of the tabernacle. It is absurd to think otherwise. So the question is not one of making Christ more present, but making us more present to him. Fr. Giles's uses the expression "the contemplative extension of the Eucharistic sacrifice."

This has to do with a very interesting feature of the Eucharistic tradition of the Church: the Elevation. Early on, people began to take the act of gazing at the Elevation of the Host and the Cup, as a very special thing. One had to see it. But it doesn't go on forever. The desire to extend the Elevation is a natural one. It cannot be resisted. The whole movement of Eucharistic adoration which has gone on in the Church is a kind of a grass roots thing. No particular priest started it. And whenever people try to stop it, it just starts up again on its own.

There is a story relative to this in a wonderful book called *Corpus Christi* written by a Jewish woman, Miri Reuben, who is an anthropologist. It is full of interesting details like this one. There was an interdict – in Florence or Venice. Some nobleman lived next door to a church where Mass was still being celebrated. So during the middle of the night he had a hole made in the wall between his house and the wall of the church so that he could look, even though there was an interdict for everybody else.

I was on Cape Cod after Christmas last winter. Holy Trinity Church there (where Rose Kennedy used to go), has Perpetual Adoration. There would be thirty cars in the parking lot at 3:30. The place was jammed with people sitting there for an hour. And they had it all signed up twenty-four hours a day, with a security guard during the night! It's an unbelievable thing. And this is not the only place. There is Perpetual Adoration in St. Peter's, in one of the side chapels – a huge chapel, full of people all the time. Adoration cannot be suppressed. The reasons for which people want to suppress it are interesting. But people want to look. When you walk into a church where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, something happens which is hard to describe. You need Mannion – or the people Mannion reads – to explain this.<sup>2</sup> It is an amazing thing and, naturally speaking, very hard to explain.

So we have this devotion to the Eucharist. I am not making a point here about whether monasteries should have Perpetual Adoration or not. I am just saying that the way we understand what this is about is central to us, as is the desire to have it and to promote it.

I love this quotation from St. Augustine about adoration: "No one receives the flesh who, beholding Him, has not first adored." St. Augustine is not just thinking of adoring the Blessed

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<sup>2</sup> Reference to three articles by M. Francis Mannion which the Assembly participants were requested to read beforehand. Cf. *American Benedictine Review* 44 (1993): 3-21, 125-142, and 291-307.

Sacrament independently of the Mass, but of adoration as the preparation for the reception. And so, all other adoration is for worthy reception.

Albert the Great said (to finish this point with a Dominican): "By gazing on what is good, we become good." That idea of looking – and sitting and looking – is big, in the Dominican tradition, and directly related to the Trinity because it is contemplative. Christ is leading us to the Father; Christ is drawing us into the trinitarian life, through the Holy Spirit.

The Eucharist ends with the "*Ite, missa est*," which means "you are sent." The pope talks about this in *Dies Domini*, the encyclical on Sunday. This is in a sense the continuation of the divine missions ("*missa*"). Son and Spirit are sent, so we are sent, and this is the whole basis of our concern for the well-being of everybody else in the world. So it is evangelical and also social. All the social activity we do and all the evangelical activity we do is rooted in the sending, according to the Pope. *Missa est*. "The Mass," we say, "is over." But that really is a poor translation. *Missa* is the *sending forth* of the congregation – and that is why the Mass is called "Mass."

#### **d. The Rosary: Bethlehem to Golgotha...and beyond**

The Rosary hardly needs a word, but I want to make one comment about it. What is the Rosary? The Rosary is just the repetition of the pattern of the sending of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the consummation. As I say here: it is "Bethlehem to Golgotha ...and beyond." We have to keep traversing it. We cannot say: "I did that last year; I'm going to do something else this year." The whole liturgical year is Bethlehem to Golgotha...and beyond. It ends with Pentecost, but really you could say it ends with the feast of the Trinity. The reason why the Rosary was so important to us is because it was an excellent tool for inculcating this pattern in the faithful, many of whom couldn't read. They depended on the church windows, the paintings, and the sermons.

One of the big literary productions in the Order is a huge number of volumes of sermons and aids for sermons (*exempla*) – a great literary record up to the end of the eighteenth century. We have got to get busy putting ours down. We think of ourselves as being literary theologians, writers of theology. The concern to make the Gospel in its depth available to everyone, I think, is one of the reasons why the [preaching of the] Rosary was so important in our evangelizing efforts. But it was also important for our own spirituality.

Thousands of people started Rosary Confraternities. Our houses were like magnets for people. It's amazing! In Italy, France, Germany: hundreds of houses of Dominicans. People used to move to be able to live next to them. Some became Third Order members, but a lot of them just joined the Confraternities. We hear little now about the Confraternities. At the House of Studies about twenty young people from Catholic University come to Mass every day. Somebody should put them in a Confraternity!

#### **e. The Mother of God**

Devotion to Our Lady is simply devotion to the one who enjoys the first fruits of the whole thing. Mary is the "beyond." She is the first human being that isn't God (because Christ is human) who is in glory. And so you might say that the queenship of Mary, the glory of Mary as we see it, is the promise that the rest of us will share it. She is the first of the saints.

#### **4. The trinitarian structure of Dominican monastic communion**

##### **a. Personal Identity shaped in relation to others**

The trinitarian structure of Dominican monastic communion is well expressed by this point: "personal identity is shaped in relation to others." It is not something you cultivate by yourself. This is the fundamental insight of monastic, conventual, religious traditions like ours. It is Mannion's point – the importance of being shaped. Religious traditions are not the expression of inner states; they are the shapers of inner states. That is a point for which Mannion draws upon Lindbeck, but it's a fundamental insight. You don't wear the Habit for the sake of other people. You wear the Habit for the sake of yourself. Putting on the Habit, you might say: "Well, I feel like a hypocrite. I'm not a holy person; I don't deserve to put on the Habit." But the Habit is going to help make you holy.

This is a fundamental point for observances: Everything in our tradition (and when I say "our tradition" I mean the whole great tradition of monastic, conventual Orders; everything before Ignatius), is based on the idea that you are transformed by the life itself. The model for us is not: me and God, but: us and God. God works through the communal life to transform us. Although it is true, in the history of Christianity, that relatively few people have lived the kinds of consecrated lives we are living or trying to live, still, the communion that is embodied in religious communities, and especially in contemplative ones, is something that is for everybody. It is heaven. That is what it means to say that the religious traditions are an eschatological sign.

#### **5. Conclusion: the Dominican Moment**

You know that I gave a talk to the Province on "the Dominican Moment." This is available from the Vocation Office of St. Joseph's Province. (I was tempted to do something similar here but changed my mind.)

I had just finished reading a remarkable book called *From Dawn to Decadence*, by Jacques Barzun, a 90-year-old professor of history at Columbia. It is a big book; a cultural history of the West over the last five hundred years, which has given me some rather interesting thoughts. Barzun is not very good on religion at all, but it is clear that the Order existed for two to three hundred years before what he calls "modernity" got rolling. And generally it has not been all that favorable a period for us. We certainly flourished. But when the Enlightenment spirit got up enough gumption to turn against religion, as it did under Napoleon, the French Revolution, and the Emperor Joseph II of Austria, they actively suppressed convents. There were convents all over Germany; they were all closed. Austria: closed. The nuns: closed. So when the Enlightenment focused its attention on our form of life, it was to the death. We nearly went out of existence, as did almost everybody else, including the Jesuits. Although they were married to the spirit of the enlightenment they were turned against for other reasons. By 1800 it wasn't clear that the Jesuits were going to continue, or the Dominicans, or the Carmelites. The Franciscans were never in danger, there were just too many thousands of them; but everybody else was. Some Orders did not recover. And all of the Orders that now exist are restored, recovered or reconstructed. You have to date us to about 1850 when the Province of France was re-founded. This cultural period, which Barzun chronicles, nearly did us in.

Now Barzun's point is that the Enlightenment is running out of steam. That is why he calls it *From Dawn to Decadence* although it is not a depressing or gloomy book. When the Enlightenment is going to run out of steam, and what is going to follow it, nobody knows. And he doesn't make any predictions.



It is very important for us that we protect the consciousness, both of our own history and of our place within the wider history of the West. We could make a lot of false moves. You see, we never received from God a promise that the Dominican Order would last until the end of time. We could lose it. And in some places it looks like we may have done so – even places like the Netherlands and Belgium, where thirty or forty years ago it would have been inconceivable that the Order would be what it is now. People would have laughed and said, "Impossible!" But it happened, and it happens fast.

The first Assembly that I attended was thirty years ago, at Caldwell. I think maybe only one or two of you were there then. We were deeply impressed when we met you. We immediately recognized the power of you nuns, and we made up our minds that we would never tell you what to do, because we thought that our elders had done that, and shouldn't have. And I am not telling you what to do – because our whole attitude has been to empower *you* to do. As the Pope says: "The Church proposes; it does not impose." So you have to decide what you are going to do.

But it is a time to look at things in the broadest possible perspective. And it is a time, it seems to me, when many of the insights of the Middle Ages about the necessity of community, of symbolism – all the things that Mannion is talking about – are not passé; they are fresh. Part of the exhaustion that Barzun sees, comes from individualism, relativism, the lack of symbolic forms. So we Dominicans have something, and that is why, when I say "the Dominican Moment" it seems to me [to be] a moment to strive to recover the heart of this tradition, and not tinker with it too much.

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## RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES AND TRANSFORMATION

Fr. John Corbett, O.P.  
Province of St. Joseph

In this presentation I have been asked to address the question of the relationship between the observances of Dominican monastic life and personal transformation in Christ. We may as well be clear about our terms. What are the observances? *The Book of Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers* informs us that:

To regular observance belong all the elements that constitute our Dominican life and order it through a common discipline. Outstanding among all these elements are common life, the celebration of the liturgy and private prayer, the observance of the vows and the study of sacred truth. To fulfill these faithfully, we are helped by enclosure, silence, the habit, work and penitential practices.<sup>1</sup>

Now the relationship between observance and transformation has always been assumed. The goal of monastic life has always been about transformation in Christ and the observances have always been central because it was believed their faithful practice reliably led to this goal. Beyond the taken for granted effect of personal transformation for the Dominican Nun herself, the observances are said to be a powerful aid to the fruitfulness of the Friars's public ministry of the Word, and indeed a powerful means of grace for the redemption of the whole world. And so there is an assumed causal relationship between a faithful living of the observances and transformation. I understand my own task here today to be that of shedding light on this relationship and not to be raising doubts about it.

But the scholastics always approached a question by raising objections. Suppose we did the same? After all what might be called the tightness of this relationship has come in for reexamination ever since the publication of *The Nuns Story*. One could argue that the monastic elements of the life actually interfere with the contemplative life of the Nuns. Could the contemplative life flourish more abundantly if the observances were approached not less seriously but perhaps less literally?

I can think of two main reasons why the relationship might be doubted. The first has to do with experience and the second has to do with ideology.

Let's start with experience. We know that conversion is a long slow process. Most of us still look more or less unfinished as saints. Many have lived long lives under regimes of strict observance and seem to have retained some vestiges of human imperfection, woundedness, and even sin. If the observances are transformative why are some of us still untransformed?

We will get a partial answer to that question when we consider that the observances are virtuous practices and hence cannot work mechanically, free of the mystery that surrounds human freedom. In the meantime, our difficulty is only somewhat lessened when we recall that these practices are directly ordered to the mystery of the Lord's cross and therefore share in the mysterious character of that cross. Just as the cross reveals its saving efficacy only to faith so the efficacy of, for example, voluntarily joining penitential practices to the Lord's cross can only reveal itself to faith. Outside of that context these practices lose their point and thus seem to share in the senseless quality of evil. Within that context even the apparent failure of transformation is an occasion for sharing in the cross and therefore for renewed faith.

The second reason why this linkage between a more or less strict interpretation and following of the observances and transformation could be doubted is less existential and more cultural. It has to do with the sharp distinction that our culture draws between formation and enrichment.

Formation involves being formed or conformed to an already established pattern. It takes natural impulses and talents and prunes them, disciplines them. It is what happens to a therapist when she is told for the 1000<sup>th</sup> time not to allow her past history to block out what a client is trying to communicate. (If the lesson does not take she will not be permitted to practice). It is what happens to a theologian when he is told that the sources of revelation and the creeds of the church have priority over his most cherished and inspired systematic construction. It is what happens to the beginning poet who is told to avoid free verse like the plague and to stick to prescribed rhythms and meters. Formation is goal driven, specifically disciplining, attentive to but not substantively dictated to by the needs and temperament of the student. Freedom for the student is the goal of formation not the starting point.

Enrichment is distinct from formation by virtue of its end not necessarily by the precision of its method or the severity of its discipline. Its goal is the flowering of the person, the expansion of the person, not the shaping of the person. For that reason someone in therapy is undergoing (possibly painful) enrichment because the therapist will not see it as her task to form the personality but to liberate it. However, the therapist in training is undergoing formation rather than enrichment because there is a norm to which her professional life is being shaped.

So our culture distinguishes sharply between the two. Formation is seen as a necessary evil. It is necessary in order to be able to function at a highly remunerated professional level. Enrichment, on the other hand, is the mark of the person with opportunities afforded by leisure and freedom. Enrichment as a classical form of leisure is its own justification.

This has consequences for our view of monastic life. For it is the monastic who is, above all, free for God. Demanding occupations and the never ending demands of family life have all been set aside in order to gain the liberty to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. This project sounds to modern ears like enrichment, not like formation. Enrichment is ordered to the flowering of the individual personality. If religious life is unconsciously thought of as a form of enrichment then it, too, is seen as ordered to the flowering of the individual. In this context disciplines which were in any case difficult enough can well begin to seem capricious, unreasonable, and formally opposed to the freedom that belongs to the Children of God. And so I think the culture's sharp distinction between formation and enrichment plus its sense that religious life is a form of enrichment has contributed to the sense that the observances need lighter, looser interpretation. It would be better to see that for the monastic person an authentic formation is profoundly enriching and every real enrichment also forms the disciple after the form of the master.

How can we resolve this question? I think we can exclude some solutions right away. For example, the question will not be resolved by appeals to obedience and law. For this is a matter for the mind before it is a matter for the will. Even if legislation came down from the highest authority demanding very strict interpretations of the Constitutions, and if everyone obeyed this legislation, the question would still remain. The human mind with its questions declines to be silenced by decree.



Nor will it be possible to resolve this question with anything like the rigor of a demonstration in formal logic. Constitutions and Rules of Life are essentially exercises in practical reason. Practical reason deals with contingencies not necessities. Except in the case of some specifiable universal negative moral norms practical reason is prudential reason and prudential reason cannot demonstrate that a given form of life will always be transformative. While this remark is of some limited speculative interest its primary importance is practical insofar as we recognize the contingency at the heart of our way of life and the fact that it will always be a venture in faith and trust.

Nevertheless, even with these limitations, there is a good bit that can be said to illuminate the linkages between observance and transformation.

I will begin with some general remarks about theological anthropology and the necessarily embodied character of our spiritual life.

I will next consider the structure of human action, and argue that the most elevating and transforming intentions of the converted heart require more proximate embodiment in some concrete disciplined observance if the elevating intentions are to be realized.

I will continue with some reflections on the relationship between virtue and religious observance and symbolic action. It is precisely the virtuous character of religious observance which explains why material observance is insufficient to effect transformation. I will suggest that religious observance is the virtue of apt and fitting symbolic language in which the nature of the future Kingdom is signaled.

Finally, I will suggest that Dominican monastic life is indeed an apostolate having a good bit of its meaning discernible in its relations with the outside world. Effective ministry, as will become evident, requires effective boundaries; and the observances as literal and metaphorical boundaries therefore enhance rather than dim the nuns' special contribution and effectiveness as agents of the coming Kingdom

### ***Anthropology and Embodiment***

Here I will simply make a point that has been made often before. Much modern thought has been until quite recently strongly influenced by Descartes. Descartes, in an attempt to resolve some questions raised by a revival of academic skepticism in France, believed that he had resolved them with his *cogito ergo sum*. This location of certitude not in the knowledge delivered by the senses but in the mind's own presence to itself led, as is well known, to considerable difficulty in establishing linkages between the mind and the external world. The mind or true self is defined as not part of the exterior world, and the human body as a consequence is seen as something that one has rather than as something that one is.

With Thomas it was otherwise. For him the soul was essentially the form of the body. Granted, it was a special kind of form, a rational principle which would survive the destruction of the matter it ensouled. Nevertheless, the soul was not attached to the body in an accidental manner. Indeed the soul as substantial form of the body could not be separated from the body and remain properly speaking human.

This has implications for our spiritual life. For example, we are saved by contact with the glorified body of Christ which is mediated to us in the sacraments of the Church about which Thomas writes "Divine Wisdom provides for each thing according to its mode...Now it is part of

man's nature to acquire knowledge of the intelligible from the sensible...Hence it is that sensible things are required for the sacraments (ST 3a Q.60 a.4).

In the context of a discussion of the virtue of charity Thomas indeed claims that the life of union with God occurs in the inward life of the mind rather than in the outward life of the senses. Nevertheless, because we are composites the way to the inner life is through the outer life of the senses. They can't be bypassed. In fact there is a reciprocal relationship between them. What happens to the body effects the mind and feelings and will. And what takes place in the depths of the spirit has also an effect on the body. Therefore, what we do with our bodies has a great impact on our spiritual life. It is sometimes noticed that the more integrated our spiritual life becomes the more not the less important our bodily behavior becomes. So the whole question of observance which has a great deal to do with where we place our bodies, what we cloth them with, how we feed and rest them and so on can't be dismissed as belonging to the lower ranges of beginning spiritual life. As long as we remain in the body these matters retain a great importance.

### ***The Structure of Human Action, Intention, and Observance***

Thomas distinguishes in his treatment of the human act between stages which apprehend, desire and choose the end, stages which apprehend and choose the means to the end, and the stages of actual performance and enjoyment. In some ways it is the first stages which are most important. The recognition of and desire for an end is not a mere wish or an inefficacious desire. The end is desired for itself and, if realized, is strong enough to summon into being all of the means which lead to it. The end as the beginning point of practical reflection has a sort of absolute ontological priority and is therefore transcendent with relation to the means to the end. Ends, absolute ends, outstrip in richness and meaning any of the chosen means.

Nevertheless, an end does remain inefficacious unless it is tied to a real means of achieving it. Daniel Westberg explains that intention:

is most characteristic of the will, because pursuing an end by definition belongs to appetite. But the relation to the end is not simply a desire for some end in general, as in a person desiring health. In the case of intention, the purpose or end of an action can be seen as the termination of the process to which the action is ordered, and it is in this way that intention regards the end. We really intend to achieve health when we mean to reach it by means of something else.

If a person claimed a desire for physical fitness, but made no moves to alter her diet or include exercise in her daily schedule, the reality of her intention would be called into question. Intention is not just a desire for a general end, but for an end through some means. Thomistic intention is not just 'planning' to do something sometime, but actually tending towards the goal by means of the actions leading to it.

...This implies a difference between intention and desire. You might desire, for example, to be a world champion skier, but cannot actually intend that without the means to it being possible, any more than you can intend to believe six impossible things before breakfast. Intention is a tending towards some actual thing, and therefore cannot be directed to happiness in general. "I just want to be happy" does not describe an intention or purpose. It only paraphrases the description of the nature of the rational appetite itself, the orientation of the will in general.<sup>2</sup>



I apologize for the length of the above quotation but it was necessary to make this point. The observances have a peculiar mixed quality of means and ends about them. Some of the observances such as liturgy and private prayer, common life, the vows and the study of sacred truth are called outstanding. Other observances such as silence, the habit, enclosure, work and penitential practices are adopted instrumentally to further the outstanding observances. While there is a clear primacy afforded to the first group of observances none of them can be described as ends in themselves, but all are directed to union with God. Notice that all of the observances are assigned this rather pedestrian status as means. This means that they all admit of and indeed are concrete action descriptions. You do not have in your constitution such observances as "directing all your heart to love," "cooperating with the grace of God," or "indwelling the Trinity." Why not? Because these ways of describing normative Christian life can't be intended without some further specifying mediating concrete action description. If we say the nuns are to be actualized in the service of love, we are offering a description of the effects of grace but we are not offering an example of a religious observance. To actually intend as a human act to, let us say, become more human in the face of God's great love, you have to have an act which ties this general intention to something specific such as obedience to the prioress, or to silence in listening to the word, or in attending the liturgy when you have just realized that what you most need in the world is to get away from everyone.

Sometimes there is a distinction drawn between monastic life and contemplative life. Often this distinction is made to the detriment of monastic life. There is some reason for this view. We are, after all, called to taste the joys of the world to come and it is for the sake of this transformation that the properly monastic practices exist. Yet without the concrete observances there would be no human way to make this intention for transformation humanly real. The observances guarantee the seriousness of the quest for contemplative life.

### **Observances and Virtue**

Fr. Pinckaers has made a major contribution to moral theology in the 20'th century in his seminal article "Virtue is not a Habit." He argues that the modern word *habit* is woefully inadequate as a translation of *habitus*. The word *habit* connotes something like a behavior induced by repetition. The sheer repetition of a behavior functions serves as a form of self conditioning so that in time the behavior becomes so much a part of the actor that it is not even adverted to. Of course, this is precisely the problem. Action which is repeated automatically and therefore thoughtlessly cannot qualify as a normative quality of action precisely because human acts are human by virtue of the thought and volition which are their form and source. So if a sister were to become habituated to a form of prayer which then would so to speak happen automatically, then that form of prayer would indeed have become a *habit* but not a *habitus*. A *habitus* requires not just the repetition of an exterior act but the repetition of the interior act of apprehension, creative thought and renewed volition which can make even familiar action fresh. With this in mind see can see why close external adherence to the observances may or may not foster transformation. If the observances are lived as *habitus* – that is from the resource of graced *interior* action – then even materially identical performances would bring fresh apprehension of the value of fasting, of common life, of study; and each external performance would in turn bring about new and deepened apprehension of the inner values. On the other hand, close attention to the external observances without an experience of their authentic inner dynamism would produce not *habitus* or virtue but would instead foster a mere habit, which would in turn produce either an agitated restlessness or the sleep of the dead.

The question of the inner flexibility and reasonableness of an authentic virtue invites us to look still more deeply at the observances. Since the observances as practices are the fruit of virtues they partake of an inspired freedom and reasonableness. What is more, since reason and freedom are spiritual powers which open the human person to completion from outside realities, the observances which are practiced virtuously have the capacity to complete and transform the nun by uniting her to the very realities which are destined to complete her. This is preeminently true of the Eucharist wherein the nun is literally conformed to the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. It is true in Liturgy of the Hours where the Nun's voice is united to the voice of the praying Church and of the ever interceding Christ. In the vows (especially the vow of obedience) one encounters and is conformed to the concrete will of Christ. The observance of study places the mind of the Nun in contact with and in conformity to the *res* encountered in faith, God's own truthfulness. The multifaceted observance of common life places the nun before that sometimes most challenging, baffling, humbling, and sanctifying exterior reality she will ever face-her sisters in Christ. In a word, the virtuous quality of the lived expression of the observances guarantees that those same observances open the Nun to living contact with those saving exterior realities which elevate and complete and sanctify her.

### ***Sacramental Symbolism, Boundaries and Monastic Observances***

In preparing this talk I was initially puzzled by the distinction that the Constitutions draws between the "outstanding observances" and those observances which serve them. Withdrawal seemed as constitutive of Dominican monastic life as study, the habit as much a *bonum honestum* as common life. The observances which serve the outstanding observances seemed really to have their own value so that to lose them would be to lose essential elements of the vocation.

In exploring this difficulty, I came upon a perhaps clumsy and misleading analogy. If the observances are like virtues in that they open the Nun to new spiritual realities perhaps they are also a little like sacraments in that they effectively mediate those realities in the language of symbol. May we think of the observances as sacramentals, not as we usually think of sacramentals as blessed physical objects but as, more precisely, blessed ongoing symbolic actions of a community?

For example, the habit represents baptismal robes and would symbolize new life in Christ. Physical withdrawal symbolizes election and belonging exclusively to God. The observances are symbols of what they point to.

However, the observances are not mere symbols of what is to come. On a certain level they can (if virtuously lived) effect what they signify. And these effects are abiding. I am thinking again of the example of withdrawal from the world by enclosure. On one level enclosure is a symbol of belonging to God and of not belonging to the world. Now this symbol is, after all a symbol. It obviously can't be taken to mean that all relationships with the outside world are abrogated by entrance into monastic life. Nevertheless, the reality of enclosure is more than a mere symbol, more than a *sacramentum tantum* of Divine election, if you will. It is also *res et sacramentum* both a sign and an abiding reality. It symbolizes Divine election out of the world precisely because it also effects a real separation from the world. If it did not achieve this real separation it could not point to the *sacramentum tantum* of Divine election and of belonging exclusively to the Lord. Just as the *voluntas simplex* requires instantiation in intention before a human act is possible, so the life of religious observances must operate concretely as abiding

practices precisely so that their broader and deeper symbolic sweep can be made available as witness.

Now it seems to me that the observances play one of two symbolic roles for the community. Some observances directly symbolize and realize communion or unity. Other observances seem to symbolize and effect distinction or boundaries. The Liturgy for example effects the unity of the monastic community while also effecting the unity of the whole Church. On the other hand, the observance of the enclosure effects a boundary as does the practice of retiring to one's cell. The observance of silence in its own way creates boundaries or spaces. Now my hunch is that when the Constitution speaks of outstanding observances they are mostly referring to the unifying observances or those that directly effect communion. When the constitutions speak of the observances which are for the sake of the outstanding observances they are speaking of those observances which establish boundaries.

Now boundaries are not negative realities. To see this clearly remember that God has established creaturehood as the necessary boundary between us and Him. "Thus far shall you come and no farther." This boundary between us and God is not negative because as Father DiNoia points out it is the condition for personal union with Him. Any closer union would in fact be absorption and the end of personal identity. And so a boundary makes a genuine communion possible.

Let me make this a little more explicit. Boundaries yield identity. And identity makes communion possible. So boundaries make genuine communion possible.

We can see this principle starkly at work when it is flouted. People who cannot tell where they begin and where they end are referred to as borderline personalities, and psychiatrists say they are among the hardest to treat and the hardest for others to live with. Priests who cannot tell where their role as priests begins and ends are dangerous because they will use their parishioners for their private gratification and, without realizing it, raise havoc wherever they are assigned. By not recognizing boundaries in their ministry and in their relationships they destroy communion.

Now I am suggesting that the observances which serve the outstanding observances serve by helping the community find its boundaries and thus its identity. And in enacting its identity its communion is established—most profoundly in the Eucharist. As we say "The Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church." It seems to me, (and I will close with this thought), that however the question of observances is handled on the level of practical detail in our monasteries, it could be fruitfully borne in mind both that the boundary observances are there for the sake of the communion-symbolizing observances (and are therefore in a sense secondary to them), and that without the boundary observances the sought after and longed for communion cannot be realized.

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## NOTES

1. *Book of the Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers*: chap. I, art. V, no. 35:II, p. 44. Published by Direction of Brother Damien Byrne Master of the Order, U.S.A., 1987.
2. Daniel Westberg *Right Practical Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).



## DOMINICAN MONASTIC OBSERVANCE AS CHRISTOLOGICAL AND SACRAMENTAL IN CHARACTER

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For some years now the theological foundations for Dominican monastic life have been the focus of conversation and study among our nuns. Indeed, I recall that in the last General Assembly of the Conference the theology of enclosure was explored as well as its historical and canonical aspects. Sister Marie Ancilla's article *Dominican Nuns and Mystery: Theology of Dominican Monastic Life According to LCM* enjoyed a wide distribution among our American Monasteries. There have been as well several collections of articles addressing various aspects of the Contemplative life of Dominican Nuns by both friars and nuns that have been read in our monasteries. Today we continue in that vein as we address the theological import of one such aspect of Dominican life, the life of Observance.

The mystery of the Incarnation must be our point of departure. It is a departure from the mundane into the sphere of the mysterious, i.e., into the sphere of what has been hidden for ages past and is now being made manifest: who God is and what he desires for us. It is the mystery of Jesus Christ, the ultimate expression of God's self-disclosure and the definitive revelation of God's plan for our life, our redemption and our happiness. It is in taking a human nature to himself, to his divinity, that God inaugurates a new relationship between the human and the divine. All things human are now charged with new significance and purpose. We look upon nothing of nature, nothing human, in light of the Incarnation, without seeing there a trace of the divine nature which touched and transformed it in the God-Man, Jesus Christ. The whole of the New Testament is a witness to the delight that God has taken in rescuing us from sin and death through the transformation of all things created and all things human. Thus our point of departure is at once to begin and to come to a conclusion. We are still here, we are still ourselves, but with minds and hearts expanded with this new knowledge of God that will serve as the operative principle for life in this world leading us to the life of beatitude, God's own life.

It is this life, ordinary human existence, transformed by the mystery of the Incarnation, that monastic communities have always sought to acknowledge and abide in — the life of the Incarnate Son who from his place in heaven continues to teach us to see the divine in the human, and urges us to see each human reality and experience as an unfolding of that long held secret that ever offers new depths of knowledge, understanding and communion, unto the ages of eternity. The "following of Christ" so fundamental to Dominican life and legislation is not only about following the poor, chaste and obedient Christ, but is a call to live by the principle of the Incarnation in which all things are made new. We are transformed and made new in Jesus Christ and now our lives are the long process of progressively discovering this truth in the particularity of our own selves, our communities, our world, even the cosmos itself.

This very notion of the manifestation of the divine in the human led the Fathers of the Church to use the language of sacrament and mystery. What is of God is made known through what is of man in Jesus Christ. As God reveals the secret of his own life and purpose we are compelled to speak of creation, the covenant, the Incarnation itself as sacraments: secrets being told, being revealed to those who are willing to receive the good news, a pledge of what is to come. These are outward signs of the reality of God's own inner life, his ideas and plans for man, his purpose and destiny. In a world view charged with the awareness of the

potency of all things human to reveal God's presence and purpose there are moments of encounter with the divine that are more perfectly, more fully "sacramental." For the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the act of worship wherein the human and the divine meet and the human gives way uniquely to the divine became the paradigm for all things of mystery and sacrament. In the act of divine cult, the created world is taken into the embrace of the divine. Even the greatest throng of participants in the earthly liturgy is outnumbered by the myriad of angels and saints who worship and adore and are present wherever the Lamb, once slain, is adored and glorified.

This primary meaning of mystery and sacrament did not stop the Fathers from seeing about them a number of other "sacraments," those kairotic moments of encounter between the human and the divine. Holy water, monastic profession, the blessing of food before a meal: these, as well, were sacraments of God's self revelation and self giving. And in giving himself to us God gives us the truth about our own selves and our future. We cannot know who we are nor where we are going apart from God. These "sacraments" and sacramental moments reveal the presence of Christ and open us to his plan for us today, tomorrow, and for all eternity. They have to power to stimulate and communicate the proper inner response to the mystery of Christ's life.

From this theological point of view the monastic life is always charged with meaning. It is a life of intensity for it is always aimed at discovering the truest meaning of all things, of attending to the divine as revealed in the human. Silence, withdrawal from the world, *lectio*, study, manual labor and, above all, the life of liturgical prayer are geared to tutor the monastic man or woman into a sensitivity to the sacramental character of human life in all of its aspects. Being available to God does not mean withdrawal from the human, but rather the focused living of the human in such wise that one will not be distracted or deceived regarding its true meaning and purpose. The world is not evil and the theme of *fuga mundi* would be heterodox were it to signify this. Rather, it is the world in its one dimensional aspect, recognizing only the human, refusing to acknowledge the transformation wrought by the Incarnation, being deaf and blind to the sacramental character of human existence that is so dangerous. In this sense the "world" is a place to flee. Monastic life is flight from the world to the monastic enclosure where life is allowed to be what it truly is: a sacrament of God's presence and action, his power and grace. Life in the monastery should be the most authentically human way of life imaginable.

All discussion of the monastic or regular observance must be guided by this fundamental theological understanding. Such is the meaning of LCM 37:1: *"Regular observance, adopted by St. Dominic from tradition or newly created by him, fosters the way of life of the nuns by helping them in their determination to follow Christ more closely and enabling them to live more effectively their contemplative life in the Order of Preachers."*

Monastic observance is simply the organization of the ordinary human aspects of life, food, clothing, shelter, work and rest, in such wise as to lead the monastic community to the greater awareness of God, to live in continual remembrance of him and to live each of these human realities in a more Godly way. They are sacramental in their nature and purpose and our Constitutions tell us that the observances constitute the chief instrument, after the seven Sacraments themselves, by which we are transformed into Christ. Indeed, we are so bold as to name the liturgy of the Church as one of our principle observances.

Observance leads one to God through a closer adherence to Christ. How? In the first instance the observances are the fulfillment of our profession, our promise of obedience. They

keep us true to our word. We promise obedience to the person of the Master of the Order, and in continuity with the ancient tradition add the promise of obedience to a way of life. Significantly, only the language of obedience appears in our profession formula. As Thomas so clearly tells us, this promise includes the vows of poverty and chastity, and, we might add, the other observances that constitute Dominica life. The observances are the incarnation, the sacramentalizing of our vocation. It is in fidelity to every aspect of Dominican life that we imitate Christ, not only in his consecration to the Father, but in his self-emptying oblation, his sacrifice, for we are always called to transcend personal preferences and plans in order to serve the common good and present ourselves in support of our sisters and brothers in the community. It is the life of virtue lived according to the norm of the beatitudes that is the immediate aim of the life of observance. A lifetime of such observance has an efficacy to transform our inner selves to become more like Christ in his perfect charity.

Fidelity to the life of observance requires a constant renunciation of will and preference. It is the way of spiritual martyrdom. The Dominican friar or nun is called to union with God through conformity to our crucified Lord; or as Cassian puts it in the Institutes, we are called to be conformed to the perfect nakedness of Christ.

In its most fundamental meaning, then, an observance is simply the external expression of a way of life. The observances are the concrete physical way in which we incarnate the way of life established by our founder, St. Dominic de Guzman. As such, they encompass the particular way in which Dominicans carry out our basic human needs. These are the aspects of life particular to our Order: the manner of prayer, of relating to one another and to the world in which we live, our way of study, of preaching and all manner of smaller things that are perhaps no less important, but express our family spirit expressed in devotions and customs that produce a certain disposition towards God and neighbor, e.g., our devotion to the dead expressed in certain prayers and acts of piety.

We can then say that the observances constitute a way of life. In the monastic tradition of both East and West this way of life is established by the rule and the founders of the community, it is not reinvented over and over. It has an objective, stable nature that can only be altered in extraordinary circumstances after careful consideration and consultation. The life of observance expresses the TRUTH of our life and the altering or eliminating of observances will have definite consequences for the way of life they express. They do not exist for themselves but for the transformation of the community into a fervent Christian community that bears the marks of the crucified One and lives in hope of the glory that is to come. These observances are our chief tool for formation, the attempt to hand on the tradition of our way of life to future generations. In the end it is not conformity to rituals and actions, but the transformation of the human heart that is the goal of observance.

Because they are the very "sacraments" that lead us to Christ the observances are holy. In light of our consecration, Thomas teaches, they become acts of the virtue of religion, ways in which the worship we pay to God in the sacred liturgy is continued, extended through the day. These are the means through which we fulfill that priesthood shared by all the baptized. They must always be treated with reverence and respect.

I should note that when discussions of "observances" are raised, some sisters hear the phrase as hearkening back to the 1940s or 50s, some time in the past. This was brought home to me more than a year ago when I was invited by a cloistered community to facilitate their chapter discussion on the reassessment of their changes in observance. The first topic on the



list was monastic clothing. In this community there was a wide range of options. One sister wore the traditional habit of the order, some wore no habit and there were several versions of modification. When one nun expressed the opinion that they had made a mistake to abandon the traditional monastic habit and gave her understanding of the habit as a central observance, another sister responded by saying that she would not want to resume that form of clothing because of the lack of hygiene, i.e., when they wore it they were not permitted to bathe regularly and they were not provided with clean underclothing. The very purpose of the decree *Perfectae caritatis* was to lay out a set of incentives and directives that would avoid this sort of confusion. One must return to the sources to understand the meaning and purpose of the observances so that they can be adapted, modified or reappropriated in a manner at once authentic and viable in today's world.

In speaking about observance we must not think of the immediate past, but we must return to the sources of our life, the beginnings of the Order and the mind and intention of St. Dominic and the early brethren and nuns who established our way of life and designed the various forms of our observances. There is no going back to the past. We are struggling to find the pathway into the future. I suggest that the rediscovery of the meaning and living of the observances is an important part of this process. The moment has come for a reassessment of the last 35 years in order to go forward with greater authenticity and vigor into the future, and most especially to hand to those coming to our monasteries seeking the contemplative life an integral formation and a realistic expression of our vocation.

Discussions about observance can easily be dismissed as retrograde or simply fussiness. We must keep our thinking clear in this matter. We are dealing with the discipline and order that make a community life possible. It is not possible to breathe inner life into the observances if they are not there; their continued existence sustains the Order through times of fervor and laxity.

In the Dominican context the role of observance is critical because unlike other traditions, it was in our adoption of standard observances, uniquely chosen and blended by St. Dominic and joined to particular theological vision that we find our specific particular identity. Recall Father Augustine's reference to those who state that there is no proper Dominican "spirituality."

Other forms of cloistered life tend to have a specific theme or focus to their lives. For the Carmelite nun, the life of observance is background for the life of prayer, especially mental prayer. A Carmelite is a prayer and everything is ordered to the hours of mental prayer and a consideration of one's progress in prayer. Poor Clares are concerned with the life of poverty and joyful simplicity. Their observances become the backdrop for this more central theme established by their founders and give their life a certain "definition" that is often a preoccupation in both their literature and their conversation. They have a "mystique" about their particular form of life.

Dominicans, on the other hand, tend to be less self-conscious. We simply live the life given to us. Our tradition of observance becomes all the more crucial because it is, in some ways, our very definition. As paragraph IV of the Fundamental Constitution of the Order tells us, it is in the very blending and balancing of these elements that we find that way of life which is properly called "Dominican," always under the rubric of having been founded before all else for preaching and the salvation of souls.

The Second Vatican Council was a call for the renewal of consecrated life in all its forms:

If the fruits of the Council are to come to maturity, religious institutes must, first of all, promote a renewal of spirit. Then they should endeavor to effect the renewal and adaptation of their way of life and of their discipline, acting prudently but, at the same time, with energy. (Norms for Renewal and Adaptation)

Dominican Nuns have seen a great change in their way of life in the last 35 years perhaps best symbolized by the Book of the Constitutions definitively published in 1987 that represents a renewed vision of Dominican cloistered life. These have been, by and large, good years. The renewal of the place of reading and study especially in the areas of scripture, liturgy, the Fathers and systematic theology have enriched both individuals and communities; a renewed awareness of the role of the chapter, the importance of participation in the government of the monastery, a flexibility in horarium, the provision for personal conversation, a greater concern for individual talents and needs, an elevated level of human culture; in sum, a certain humanness has been introduced our monasteries in which we can rejoice that so much has been achieved in these three decades.

There remains the question however, as we face our present crisis of reduced numbers and aging membership, of the specific identity of our life of observance. When one considers that many of the traditional observances of Dominican contemplative life have been abrogated or seriously mitigated, there remains the question of the future. Consider the profile of Dominican monastic observance for some seven centuries: the night office, perpetual abstinence, the long fast, strict enclosure, penitential practices both public and private.

These observance entailed a life of asceticism and a spirit of penance that created a certain atmosphere or climate in the life of the community, not unlike that which is generated by the practice of Eucharistic adoration.

What sacramental and Christological meaning was contained in each of these observances? Were changes made simply on the basis of practical accommodation to changing times and a concern for aggiornamento? Was there sufficient recourse to the sources of the monastic and Dominican tradition and sufficient theological reflection on the consequences of such changes?

I am not suggesting the restoration of these practices. Rather, it seems that as we stand on the brink of a new chapter in our existence, we must reconsider the changes of the past 35 years from their theological perspective: their sacramental and Christological meaning. Has the ascendancy of the principle of efficiency and practicality threatened our ability to think theologically, to grasp a high ideal, whether we are new or old in Dominican life?

If I may use a simple example: the difficulties of kitchen and refectory are axiomatic in modern monastic life, in both its masculine and feminine forms. The change in the usages of the refectory effect a change in values and attitudes. Self service, or the buffet line bypasses the ancient notion, contained in the earliest monastic sources, that one is called to exercise great renunciation in the area of communal meals by eating what is set before one. Once we can choose just and only what we want it is a short step to feeling that we have a right to what we want. If we do not see what we want we go and get it or demand that someone get it for us. The cult of the rights of the person, so strong in our culture, can easily intrude into the system of monastic values. It is no wonder that sometimes there are as many special dishes as there



are monks or nuns in the modern monastic kitchen. The observance of the common table can give way to the arena of individual desires and preferences.

Surely the usages of such a regime in the refectory will have reverberations in the discussions of the chapter or the spirit of manual labor.

All things in the monastery are oriented towards charity. It is an interconnecting whole. The selfless love of the crucified can only be learned through a life of asceticism and renunciation. The *habitus* of genuine charity requires the destruction of egoism and self absorption. The life of observance is intended to facilitate this process.

The observances are forms of separation from the world. They keep the monk or the nun from the false values and indulgences of the world. The physical boundaries of enclosure are a kind of final note in the whole round of observances that separate the nuns from the world. We live life in a different fashion: we eat and sleep, we dress, work and pray in ways “other” than the world around us. As we carry out the observances we *are* “apart from the world.” The enclosure is the formalization of a whole movement within the observances themselves.

For this reason, a serious reassessment of the last 35 years seems very much in order. One senses a general consensus that in the future we may have smaller numbers in our monasteries. But small “observant” communities are not a new reality in the Order. The question is not one of change and adaptation, but of vision, an integral vision of Dominican contemplative life that while faithful to the past, is prepared to go courageously into the future. Without such a vision we will not be able to respond the hunger of those who come to our doors seeking admittance and those who come seeking the witness of authentic Dominican monastic life.

Not infrequently Pope John Paul II expresses the conviction that the Christian people have a right to hear the faith preached and taught in all its fullness. It is for the future that I suggest a serious reconsideration of our immediate past. Those who come to us seeing to be formed in our way of life have a right to receive it in its fullness. Indeed, I suspect that you will discover that they will only come to you if they are convinced that they will find it in its full vigor.

When viewed from a later period in history it is likely that the topic for our discussion will seem puzzling in the extreme. We are born of and live in an age in which conversations are had about the fundamental realities that have been taken for granted in other ages. Only the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century could produce schemes for classes in how to parent children or courses in how to become a successful spouse and good husband or wife. And we, consecrated members of the Order of Preachers must follow suit. What has been taken for granted in the past and will likely be again in the future, must be discussed, explored, considered anew. The life of observance, simply understood to be the concrete expression of our way of life, the sacrament and mystery of the Dominican vocation, must be addressed anew. ><

## DOMINICAN MONASTIC OBSERVANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

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Province of St. Joseph

Any study of religious movements suggests that some historical moments or periods are of greater influence and significance than others. For the historian, sociologist, anthropologist or theologian, this is not so much a value judgment as it is an observation. In terms of western spirituality one such critical moment can be fixed in Europe in the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the very height of what we have come to call the Middle Ages. This was a period of intense activity and progress in human culture and religious understanding.

The renewal of biblical studies and a biblical piety, the founding of the mendicant orders, the rise of the universities, the appearance of the Schools and Scholasticism were part of a broader movement in the culture at large, but profited the Christian Church in ways still being discovered. It is not without significance for our topic that ours was a religious order founded in this world of progress, enthusiasm and creativity. The spiritual vigor and apostolic fervor of the early friars and nuns, while generated from within by the gift of a vocation through the Holy Spirit, was supported and looked upon benignly by a large segment of the world about them. Those first of our friars and nuns were very much men and women of their time: a world turned on its ear with long established institutions and mores being challenged in such a way as to cause the weak of heart to think that the end was near. The optimism of the age was moderated by the gloomy predictions of nay sayers and the dire prophecies that we would today likely classify as religious fanaticism. It was into this world of change, challenge and chaos that the Order of Preachers was born.

Clearly the 20<sup>th</sup> century is destined to go into the memory of history as another such moment. The information explosion, the advancement of science, the triumph of technology and all the consequent benefits flowing from these have changed human life and its possibilities with unprecedented speed and, it seems, in the twinkling of an eye. At least thirty years ago Father Chenu drew a dramatic parallel between the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. He did so, speaking to Dominicans, in order to give insight and encouragement for the situation in which the Order finds itself today. We must be men and women of our time.

At the same instant we recognize what is monitored by social scientists of our time, that while there is great progress in science and technology, our age is witnessing as well the unraveling of the cultural and moral values associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition. The dignity of the human person and the value of life is, paradoxically often in conflict with the insistence on the rights of the individual and the definitive turn towards the subjective, so decided a turn that some call it the culture of narcissism.

This has profound significance for all forms of the consecrated life, but most especially for the monastic life, always discerning how to live in this world and yet be apart from it, indeed to be counter cultural in the best sense of that term.

The consideration of some of the theological notes about observance may well serve as a stepping stone to an analysis of the task ahead for in the history of monastic life, it is precisely the observances that have served as the benchmark for measuring the state of a community, its fidelity to the contemplative life and its possibilities for the future. Observance,

recall, is a way of life, with a profound theological, inner meaning. The quality of life in a monastery may be measured by the care and fervor of the observance; but it must exist, it must be in place in a community, before its quality can be assessed.

In the tradition of the autonomous monastery, even when grouped under membership in an order such as our own, canonical visitations, regular chapter and ongoing legislation have always been centered on the life of the observance. The more gross violations of the monastic vocation such as financial malfeasance, sexual impropriety or public scandal aside, visitation reports, statutes, norms, customaries, constitutions, are unanimous in this focus. In a time that has witnessed such wholesale revision of the observances this is important to keep in mind.

A simple perusal of the primitive constitutions of the Nuns reveals this focus, particularly in the penal code that it contains. The faults and the corresponding penalties or penances are primarily those against the observances and thus against the common good, the disruption of the good order of the community and consequently a threat to that unity which, in the Augustinian view of monastic life, is the great sign of charity.

Father Augustine's presentation referred to those who hold that there is no proper "Dominican" spirituality. The reason for this assertion is that the elements of our way of life preexisted us and were borrowed by St. Dominic and the early brethren and nuns from the broad monastic tradition: from the Cistercians, the Premonstratensians and the Monks of the Order of Grande Monte. Any element of our life or our observances can be found elsewhere. Little is original with Dominic. Rather it was the unique manner in which he blended these together for the purpose of preaching and the salvation of souls and stabilized the whole Order with a governmental system that has stood the test of nearly eight centuries and saved the Order from being rendered asunder despite the many conflicts and difficulties through the centuries. The solemn celebration of the liturgy is typical of the Benedictines and Canons Regular. The emphasis on common life was the hallmark of the Order of Premontre with their Augustinian orientation. Study was part of Benedictine and Cistercian life and certainly was a central part of the Norbertine customs. It is the bringing together of certain traditional elements of the tradition with the theological vision that perhaps best expresses the Dominican tradition of spirituality. Our life of observance is linked to a particular understanding of the whole mystery of creation and redemption. Finding its source in the mind and heart of St. Dominic is has found expression in the teaching of the great theologians of the Order, most especially of St. Thomas Aquinas. The Dominican understanding of the dynamic relationship between grace and nature, our anthropology and our particular orientation to mystery of the Incarnation as the way to the Father's heart was well expressed by Father Augustine. It is this that is the heart of what we might call "Dominican spirituality."

For the Dominican, formal study about God leads one to celebrate this mystery in the choir and to share that mystery with one's brothers and sisters in community. There is a certain unity or integrity to the daily regime of the Dominican friar or nun. Recall that in the primitive constitutions of the nuns the mistress of novices is urged to teach the novices not only to memorize the psalms and the whole of the New Testament, but to "ruminate on the sacred mysteries" as she goes about her daily tasks in the monastery. It is the engagement of the whole person, body and spirit that is the aim of Dominican observance. It is this self emptying discipline by which one becomes more like unto Christ and more disposed to the life of charity, ready for that mutual acceptance and love that must characterize every authentic Christian community.



In the early centuries of the Order, Dominican monastic life showed itself rather successful at navigating the choppy waters of cultural change and transition, usually by clinging to the life of observance. When chased from their monasteries or fleeing from invading armies, sometimes for years at a time, the returning nuns knew what to do. Begin again to live like a Dominican nun. The life of observance became the fertile ground in which to replant the tender shoot of a community reconstituting itself. Margaret Ebner as well as the nuns of Engenthal are witnesses to the primacy of observance in just such circumstances.

In the fifteenth century the Black Death left in its wake a terrible devastation of the population in general and religious orders in particular. More detailed legislation began to appear in the Constitutions of the friars and nuns to regulate aspects of the observance formerly taken for granted, most especially the life of prayer, religious exercises and common life.

The reforms of the Order, whether on a small scale or more grand in scope were always centered on the norms of observance with the understanding that as they were neglected or disappeared so did the virtues and values they expressed or enshrined.

It is in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, that the radical break with the tradition was effected at the time of the French Revolution. Re-establishing the Order in France Lacordaire strove to discover the true genius of the Order to reorganize it among the people of "the Church's eldest daughter." From the struggles and misunderstandings between Lacordaire and Jandel we know how complex a process it turned out to be. Most of the struggles were centered on the observances: Lacordaire insisting on what we could only call today a life of strict observance and Jandel espousing a primitive observance.

This re-creation and refounding of the Order in France, both friars and nuns, had important implications for monasteries here in the United States. It was overshadowed by several important factors:

- Influence of 17<sup>th</sup> century French spirituality
- Dominance of the Carmelite reform
- Rise of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
- Devotion to the Rosary
- Notion of perpetual prayer

Just as aspects of Ignatian spirituality found their way into the constitutions and customs of most orders, even autonomous monasteries of monks and nuns, the ascendancy of the Carmelite reform brought to France by Cardinal Berulle left its mark on Dominican cloistered life. While clinging to many of their own observances, Dominican monasteries added many customs and pious practices from other traditions such as instruction in discursive prayer, the reading of "points" for meditation, the use of the general and particular examen. The lack of study and the almost complete disappearance of the practice of *lectio divina* as it was understood in earlier ages produced a lacuna that was filled with a piety and devotionism that would have to be described, in today's terms, as sentimental. More significantly, the notion of the prioress as spiritual mother and her right to appoint the members of her council could only relegate the role of the chapter to a legal fiction. More and more monasteries came under the direct jurisdiction of the bishop, following the Carmelite pattern, rather than remain or return under the jurisdiction of the prior provincial, or the master of the Order.



The 19<sup>th</sup> century cult of the rule, the exaggerated deference for the superior and the tendency to centralization produced a rather generic form of religious life. The proliferation of modern congregations, often inspired by the Jesuit model, began to make the autonomous monastery, once the staple of religious life, less and less familiar and appealing. There were even considerations of bringing these canonical units together into an "order." This was only accomplished in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Holy See began to insist on federations and associations. As modern Benedictines delight to repeat, there is no such thing as the Benedictine "Order." There is only this linking together of autonomous monasteries under the loose authority of the Abbot Primate.

The form of Dominican cloistered life brought to the United States was in this sense an amalgam of several influences. There seems to have been no consideration of founding a monastery near a convent of the brethren. Sometimes there were friars to serve as chaplains, but by and large, this does not seem to have been a concern for the early French Mothers and their American successors.

The first American prioresses and their successors, with typical American industry and determination, strove to develop a level of observance that was at once authentic and exacting. They are reported to have been quite strict, but loving. They began to be concerned about the quality of the Gregorian chant, the nuns' lack of knowledge of Latin. Lectures from the friars began, often irregularly and amiable relationships developed, though always distant and highly formalized. Life within the enclosure was strenuous because the mixture of traditions produced a horarium in which there was never a moment free, no time was spent in the cell, and interpersonal encounters, even during the recreation period, were frowned upon. The singing of the divine office, together with the large number of vocal prayers and devotional practices left little time for reading. Serious study, while not unknown, was not commonplace and was not available to most of the nuns.

These are some of the circumstances in which the call to renewal was heard by our monasteries. The prudence and courage of those prioress who launched out into the waters of change is to be admired. It quickly became obvious that *ressourcement* was as important as adaptation. Organized lecture series or short courses and the whole process of producing a new book of the constitutions helped the nuns of our monasteries to understand the need to rediscover the Dominican tradition of observance and to filter out those elements foreign or unnecessary for traditional Dominican monastic life.

Among some cloistered groups these same decades have had the unfortunate result of division and discord. Extreme forms of life have emerged: on the one end the apparent abandonment of most external observances; on the other a rigid clinging to the form of observance "as it always was." This is not the case with the Dominican nuns in the United States. While there are clearly differing theological and philosophical outlooks, there remains a certain unity, charity and cordiality that is due in part, I believe, to the creation of the Conference as an organization that is not intrusive into the life of the autonomous monastery, but is intended to foster the deepening of monastic life through cooperation in certain projects and sisterly sharing.

Dominican nuns, armed with the new book of the Constitutions have gone forward attempting to understand the implication of the new vision of Dominican contemplative life

embodied in LCM. Not all the nuns are yet convinced of this new vision. The stress of our current crisis does not help.

It is perhaps a more critical time than we realize, since, as I indicated in part one of my presentation, we have just passed through the most serious revision of the observances in our entire history. All of the major observances of the tradition have been affected either by way of abrogation or mitigation. It is for this purpose that I suggest that we are at a moment of reappraisal.

Our goal is charity, of course, but charity precisely as Dominicans and in the Dominican way of grace and charity. One cannot will the end, one cannot achieve the end without the proper means. The observances are chief among them. But the ultimate question is the vision of your own vocation that you share with your sisters and that you must articulate not only for yourselves but for those who will join you in the future as well as those to whom you are accountable as your religious superiors.

The Church's own concern is evidenced in the recent publication of *Verbi sponsa* which has touched off some puzzling reactions among our nuns and even some of the friars. It is another reminder of the specific character of the moment in which we are living.

Certainly one of the issues that our monasteries must face is that of how to interface with the culture. While I would not want to continue the spirit of "manifest destiny" nor the nineteenth century movement labeled "Americanist," nonetheless one must realize that we have a unique political, cultural and religious experience here in the United States. Extremists criticize the Roman Catholic Church and international orders such as our own as being dominated by Euro-centered spiritualities and theologies. That exaggeration aside, one must realize that the situation of autonomous monasteries in a culture such as our own may not be easily understood by people from other cultures. Geographical, religious and cultural diversity are paramount. If this is a moment of reassessment, it is also a moment when, as *Verbi sponsa* rightly points out, it will be up to you to articulate to the Master of the Order and his assistant for nuns your experience and insights that will contribute to building the future of the Order. Father Merten's presence here is the signal of the desire on the part of the general administration of the Order to listen and collaborate.

Social scientists, sociologists and anthropologists of religion, even the articles by Msgr. Mannion, are clear in their suggestion that among the young of our culture there is a religious reawakening. Among those who are under 30 it is the concern for orthodoxy that typifies the religious seeker. For them orthodoxy is the sign of stability and continuity in a tradition or institution. This they expect to be expressed in very traditional symbols. Younger Catholics tend to be decidedly Eucharistic in their spirituality, Marian and strongly devoted to the magisterium. We who helped to engineer the changes of the period immediately following the Council may read this as conservative. In fact, if social scientists are correct, we are witnessing a cultural shift. What may indeed be judged by some as a swing to the conservative right may well be simply a cultural paradigm shift with which we will find ourselves out of step if we do not heed the signs of the times.

The starting point of any considerations must be the realization that as autonomous monasteries belonging to an apostolic order you play a unique role in the order and have a unique theological and canonical identity. The autonomous monastery has a canonical identity

with attendant rights and obligations. The articulation of the vision and spirit of your understanding of contemplative life must precede any mature considerations about merging communities or making new foundations. So often the talk about making foundations, closings and merging is primarily a geographical consideration, not one of vision or the spirit of a particular expression of Dominican monastic life.

Only you can instruct the brethren as to the true nature of your vocation. We are here to help, but we must listen first and foremost. You must insist that your law be observed in each monastery, and that it be respected by diocesan officials, federal assistants, priest consultants and regular superiors alike. The particular law of the nuns protects the rights of the community and the individual. It should be carefully attended to. The agenda of monasteries in other parts of the world or other language groups may not be yours. You must discern your own agenda.

One danger of the moment is the temptation to become distracted by issues and projects that are not essential to living Dominican monastic life today. If you have not read *Sisters in Arms* and *Sisters in Crisis* I would urge you to do so.<sup>1</sup> In our time religious communities in decline have tended to multiply structures and increase bureaucracy. More projects with fewer people to carry them out. And fewer people to carry on the day to day project of actually living community life.

If the past 30 years have indeed been good years it is because of the grace of the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit will lead and guide you through the next 30 years so that you may successfully complete the course God has marked out for you. What he has so wonderfully begun, may he bring to completion. ✂

#### NOTE

1. Reviews of these two books can be found in this issue of *DMS*.





## THE OBSERVANCES OF SILENCE AND ENCLOSURE

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The climate in which monastic prayer flowers is that of the desert, where the comfort of man is absent, where the secure routines of man's city offer no support, and where prayer must be sustained by God in the purity of faith. Even though he may live in a community, the monk is bound to explore the inner waste of his own being as a solitary. The Word of God which is his comfort is also his distress. — Thomas Merton<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

These words, written by a Cistercian monk in the late sixties, still ring true. And if they ring true, they resonate in the heart of every Dominican nun. Our own Constitutions tell us that we should prepare the way of the Lord in the desert by our prayer and penance (LCM 96:II).

There are many different ways to approach God in prayer. He fascinates us by his presence, power and essence manifested in creation; he speaks to us in the law and the prophets, and in the Word made flesh; he draws us through the liturgy of the Church and moves us interiorly by his Spirit. For those who have responded to his call to Dominican monastic life, he provides us with a well-trodden path and a clearly articulated agenda.

The last thirty-five years since Vatican II have been characterized by rapid change, a questioning of traditional values, an openness to the world and to new ways of expressing and proclaiming the Catholic faith. We have all been caught up in this wave, to a greater or lesser extent. In obedience to the Church's mandate we have taken a critical look at the way our religious life is structured. We have studied the Dominican and monastic sources of our particular charism and tried to acquire a better understanding of our relationship to contemporary culture.

The stated intention of this Assembly is to pause for a moment and take stock of what has been going on in the last three decades of the twentieth century. I have been asked to look specifically at the observances of silence and enclosure, where many dramatic alterations have occurred. The time span is framed by two documents that address this issue and communicate to us the mind of the Church with regard to cloistered nuns: *Venite Seorsum* in 1969, and *Verbi Sponsa* in 1999.

When I began to think about writing this talk last fall, my first impulse was to put the word "enclosure" in brackets and concentrate on the primitive monastic concept of withdrawal from the world. This word seemed to be free of legislative trappings, and it has a more active connotation – something freely chosen. We turn away from the empty preoccupations and illusions of the secular world in order to turn our eyes and our thoughts and our whole being toward the Lord. This is a clear step at the beginning of any religious vocation. We are "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead" (Phil 3:13; LCM 1:III).

But the longer I struggled with my assigned task, the more convinced I became that this would not work. Withdrawal is part of the picture, but monastic enclosure is not just an act of free choice. It is a physical reality, a container. The observances are a package deal, held together in a sacred space and guarded by silence. Dominicans should be able to understand this. Our whole way of doing theology is permeated with this kind of realism: the goodness of the physical world spoken out of nothingness by the Creator, the mystery of the Word Incarnate who suffered and died and rose again in the flesh, the economy of Church and sacraments which serve as concrete channels for the gifts of the Spirit. We are naturally suspicious of any symbol-talk that diminishes or disregards the Real.

Monastic enclosure is about real separation: real walls and real doors. There is a real difference between the life lived within this environment and the life lived outside. Simon Tugwell has said that nuns are simply a scoop of humanity in need of redemption, and this is true. But he also says that we take redemption as a full-time job, and that makes all the difference.<sup>2</sup>

What is the point of this physically delineated sacred space? Why do we choose to live with such limitations? Let me first state what this paper is not going to be about:

I will not be venturing into the history of enclosure. History, like the Bible, can be used to support opposing perspectives. A 1998 issue of *Cistercian Studies* contains an article entitled "The Undivided Heart: Another Look at Enclosure." It was written by Mary David Todah OSB, a Solesmes Benedictine and part of a group which produced a book on this topic (in French – the English translation is in process). The history presented in the article is a distillation of the group's broader research. Her basic thesis is that women had freely chosen strict enclosure long before the canonical regulations were set down by the Church.<sup>3</sup>

If you look back thirty years, in the same Cistercian series, you will find two articles by Peter Anson on "Papal Enclosure." He covers essentially the same history as Todah. His main argument is that religious men were responsible for locking up religious women in order to protect their chastity. This negative interpretation seems to be the one that is most prevalent today.<sup>4</sup>

And that leads me into the second area that I am not planning to cover: legislation. The typical history of enclosure is in fact virtually synonymous with a history of development in canonical regulations. There are competent friars present who will lead us through this thicket later on, and I gratefully yield to their expertise. A study of enclosure is not best served by concentrating on the permitted and the forbidden: how far can I go, and by whose authority? This is like the analogous mistake that has been made in moral theology.

The particular task at hand this morning is to look at the practice of silence and enclosure as it has developed or changed since Vatican II. In order to do that fruitfully we have to reflect on the basic theological principles that underlie these observances, because they can only be understood and lived in the light of faith. Both Cassian and St. Thomas would advocate beginning at the end. Cassian's first Conference asks about the goal of the monastic observances. Thomas speaks in terms of final causality: to know the nature of anything is to know why it exists, the purpose it is intended to serve.

In another sense of the word we will begin at the end of the legislation history by using the book of our present Constitutions. We have hardly begun to scratch the surface of this

document which was presented to us thirteen years ago. The ordering of the observances and the clarity with regard to our dual monastic and Dominican heritage are really astounding when compared with earlier versions of the nuns' legislation. It is a magnificent example of the Spirit's grace at work in the first years following the Council. Friars and nuns did their labor of *ressourcement* and produced a text that is rich in sound doctrine and offers real food for ongoing *lectio* and meditation.

To summarize these introductory remarks, my conviction is that an evaluation of changes in the practice of our observance of silence and enclosure should be based on three criteria: theological principles derived from the Dominican and monastic tradition, our own legislation as it is reflected in the latest edition of our Constitutions, and the most recent Church document on enclosure, *Verbi Sponsa*. St. Augustine spoke of his Rule as a mirror. If there is a disjunction between what we know and believe and the way we behave, then this is matter for discussion, further reflection, and working toward a resolution of the disparity.

## **Fuga Mundi**

There are many different paths to holiness, and many different words used to express the goal. A life of regular observance does not create holiness – or purity of heart or charity or contemplation. Its purpose is to mediate the goal to us and set the stage for uncovering the obstacles to the goal. Ascetical discipline is revelatory. Of itself it can do nothing without the grace of God. But in the demands that it makes on body and soul, it shows us to ourselves. It summons us from our hiding place behind the tree so that we can stand naked before the living God who calls us by name. The story no longer ends with fig leaves and exile, but with a wedding garment and welcome to the Lord's own table.

The very first requirement for facing this truth – which is the beginning of our transformation – is that we stay put and let it happen. The earliest monastic advice on the subject, given to the desert monk Arsenius, still holds good at the beginning of the twenty-first century: *fuge, tace, quiesce*. Remove yourself from the secular world, stop the incessant flow of chatter, curb the wandering mind, and hold your heart in stillness for the Lord's visitation. This was a constant refrain in Jordan of Saxony's letters to Diana: "My eyes are ever towards the Lord" (Ps. 25:15).<sup>5</sup> It is the eschatological expectation of the Catholic Church, which monks and nuns live with particular intensity and single-hearted devotion. Silence and enclosure are the observances that carry this traditional admonition down to us through our own Dominican constitutions. We are freed for God alone by our withdrawal from the world in fact and spirit, and silence is the guardian of all observance (LCM 36; 46:II).

"The purpose of all regular observance, especially enclosure and silence, is that the word of God may dwell abundantly in the monastery." The word dwells in us and we in it. Dwelling, abiding, remaining in the Word, we begin to see the truth and the truth makes us free. As with John the Baptist, this word comes to us in the desert, and it is in the desert that we prepare the way of the Lord by our prayer and penance. St. Dominic associated the nuns with his "holy preaching" precisely by their prayer and penance. (LCM 96:I,II; 1:I)

*Fuga mundi* is a way of following Christ as he withdraws into the desert solitude to renew his consecration to the Father's will and to confront the powers of darkness who would prevent its accomplishment. This type of withdrawal is no more a depreciation of the goodness of God's



creation than are the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Monastic observances fall under the rubric of asceticism and not mysticism per se. That is why Dominicans, by and large, might feel more at home with the language of *Venite Seorsum* than that of *Verbi Sponsa*. These practices, this way of being consecrated to God, are a corrective for the original defiance and refusal that turned the world away from God in the beginning. Celibacy, enclosure and the other renunciations that we freely embrace for the sake of the goal facilitate the restoration of the *imago* that has been disfigured by sin.

The language of past enclosure legislation is admittedly off-putting to the modern woman: the notion of chastity protection for the weaker sex is less than inspiring for most of us. We need a fresh perspective in order to appropriate a tradition that is still formative for monastic women and men of the 21st century. What does *fuga mundi* mean for us today? It is the wisdom that recognizes the greatest obstacle to dwelling in the inmost heart of God's truth: distraction, diversion. Fr. Sertillanges, O.P. called attention to this critical problem eighty years ago in his book *The Intellectual Life*:

Diversion, *divertissement*: literally, the word means turning aside from ourselves and our destiny to find distraction in occupations, amusements, etc. "The whole calamity of man" (wrote Pascal) "comes from one single thing, that he cannot keep quiet in a room."<sup>6</sup>

*Fuga mundi* is the sign of a paradox: it is the world that is in flight from God and itself, and we are the ones who seek to dwell in the world as God knows it to be. By the observance of enclosure we deny ourselves not only the many good things associated with space and mobility, but also the diversions which serve as narcotics and escapes for modern culture. The world is becoming incapable of silence, stability, fidelity – the recognition that absolute truth exists and the human person is capable of attaining it. "Freedom from" has become divorced from "freedom for." Our General Assembly in 1988 looked closely at this phenomenon. The world has lost its reference point, it is a world without end.

## Regular Observance

*Vita Consecrata* encourages religious to show concern for what the world neglects.<sup>7</sup> We possess and exemplify a truth of which contemporary society is sorely in need. But we have to flesh this out a bit. Nuns are accustomed to being asked by visitors: "What do you do all day?" This is a great mystery to those outside the walls who cannot conceive of existence without noise, travel, entertainment. What we do all day is...the observances. They map out our daily, weekly, yearly routine. St. Dominic makes this clear in his letter to the nuns of Madrid:

Up to this time you have had no house suitable for following your religious life, but now you will have no such excuse for negligence, seeing that you are provided with a convent where regular observance can exactly be carried out.<sup>8</sup>

When we refer to regular observance as a package deal, we are not talking about a set of minute practices that fill up the time – the bell rings and we move on to the next exercise. "To regular observance belong all the elements that constitute our Dominican life and order it through a common discipline" (LCM 35:II). St. Dominic adopted and adapted these elements

because they represent the wisdom of a solid tradition. The monastic observances that he embraced for the whole Order are grounded in a Christian philosophy, psychology and theology that does not become outdated or obsolete with the passing of the centuries.

In the next part of my talk I want to look at the first item listed in LCM under the principal elements for the formation of novices, namely common life united with silence and solitude (LCM 118:II). Enclosure serves both of these elements, facilitates them, and makes them fruitful for growth in charity.

## **One Mind and Heart in God**

In the article on enclosure that I mentioned earlier, Mary David Todah says that one who is drawn to the desert or the monastery is motivated by "the desire for a unified life, separated from all multiplicity, in order to give oneself entirely to God."<sup>9</sup> This phrase struck a chord in me, for obvious reasons: the one mind and one heart that are at the core of the Rule of Augustine and recur in his other writings as a dominant theme of Augustinian theology. If, as Dominicans, we are in search of truth, as daughters of St. Augustine we long for unity: an integration of the self through ever greater conformity to Christ, a oneness of will and purpose with our sisters in community, and ultimately union with the Triune God.

For Augustine, the word *monos* did not refer to the solitary monk, alone with the Alone, but to the monastic community called to be one in its total focus on God and the things of God. The final end that is set before us, the goal of our life, is what makes possible the charity and pursuit of the common good that we all desire. St. Thomas' theology of the virtues operates on this principle. We cannot have one mind and one heart except in God – the eyes of each and all ever towards the Lord.

Living under one roof does not create community, just as the sum of the observances do not create holiness. Community is there, given to us by God in Christ. We are invited to participate and this will entail removing the obstacles to participation. The monastic practices that constitute our life were developed over a long period of time. They had been tested in the desert experience of the early fathers and proven to be the best training ground for growth in virtue, especially the fundamental virtues needed to live in common with other people: patience, humility, discretion.

Enclosure sets the stage for this. We remain, we are committed to one another, *usque ad mortem*. This kind of fidelity is becoming unknown in the world. Marriage and family life, the very cornerstone of any civilized society, are eroding. Spouses pledge undying love and then walk away when the going gets rough. We face the same temptation, and in monastic life this seductive demon is as old as the vice of acedia: the restlessness that drove a monk outside of his cell, away from the desert, in search of a more congenial setting for his own life project.

Enclosure is a determining factor in the way our common life is structured. Current theories of psychology and social dynamics may be helpful, but they are inadequate for dealing with this specific type of reality. Often they are based on principles that are incompatible with a Dominican theology of the human person.

The friars also recognize the value of a sacred space for ensuring the quality of their common life. LCO says that the cloister must be observed so that "the intimacy of their religious

family may be increased, and that the authenticity and character of our religious life may be revealed" (LCO 41). We recently listened to some tapes in our refectory, novitiate classes on Dominican history given by Fr. Fred Hinnebusch, OP. He reminded the brothers that entrance into religious life has always been understood as a break not only with the world but with one's own family. This used to be symbolized by the taking on of a new name – like Abraham and Sarah when they left their country and their kindred and their father's house. Religious profession means that our first responsibility is no longer to the natural family but to the monastic community, the Dominican Order, the Church.

Maintaining the self-identity that developed and was nurtured in the family circle can even become a stumbling block to the maturity required for living an authentic common life. Timothy Radcliffe has written a number of times in his letters to the Order about the renunciation that gives the friars freedom for mission: "a radical break with our family ties..., a disinheritance...." These are strong words, but he also acknowledges that modern sensitivities create a problem in this area. Consecration to God should free the brothers to serve the purpose of the Order. "It is paradoxical that it is often the members of the family who are in religious vows who are considered 'free' to help look after aged or ill parents."<sup>10</sup>

As women dedicated to the purely contemplative life, we are united in our insistence that we are not available for the needs of the active apostolate, or for extensive collaboration with the other branches of the Order. The Church has always given its unqualified blessing to this vocation and continues to do so in *Verbi Sponsa*. Are we inconsistent if we consider ourselves free for the needs of our immediate families? This turning back draws attention and energies away from our common life task: having one mind and heart in God.

In Conference 24 on Mortification, Cassian tells a story about Abba Apollos.<sup>11</sup> His own blood brother once came to him in the dead of night begging for help to rescue an ox which had become stuck in a swamp a little way off from the monastery. Apollos replied: "Why did you not ask our younger brother, whom you passed over even though he was nearer than I?" The brother assumed that Apollos must be getting weak in the head from his long life of renunciation and protested: "Can I call from the grave someone who died fifteen years ago?" Apollos answered: "Do you not know, then, that I also died to this world twenty years ago and that from the grave of this cell I can no longer offer you any help as far as the present life is concerned?" He went on to say that he had not even turned aside from his purpose to attend his father's funeral.

Early in the year 1229 Andreolo d'Andalo died. Jordan of Saxony wrote from Milan to comfort his daughter Diana:

Those who are left to live on in this world weep and are sad for the death of their friends who go before them; but those who have died first do not mourn in the other world over the death of those who come after them. And you, beloved, you are long since dead with Christ if your life is hid with him in glory.... Think with wonder of the gentleness of God, how he takes from you...what you could not hope to cling to for ever, only to give you what is eternal and shall never be taken from you for ever.<sup>12</sup>

Early in the year 1997 my own father died. Someone told me at the time that this loss would draw me to see more clearly the whole point of monastic life: death, in order to be born



into eternity. I had spent some days at home when my father was hospitalized, and I went again at the time of the funeral. There were many phone calls back and forth during the last year of his life as my mother and sister kept me abreast of developments. I did not visit him during his mercifully brief stay in a nursing home.

It was very difficult for me to make responsible decisions about all of this because of the current climate of ambiguity with regard to enclosure. The door has been opened wider and wider during the past thirty years, and such interaction with family is considered to be the only reasonable and charitable way to go. The assumption has been that the next piece of Church legislation would recognize this reasonableness. With the promulgation of *Verbi Sponsa* we see that this is not the case. Neither that document nor the 1987 edition of LCM gives clear support for what has become common practice in our monasteries. It is not for us to judge particular instances of dispensation in this regard. What we do need to examine is the prevailing attitude that everyone has a right to this dispensation as a matter of course.

### **Silence and Solitude**

Common life is only half the story. Aspirants frequently come to us from fragmented, dysfunctional families and they exhibit a great longing for community. But if they have not acquired the fundamental maturity needed to deal with silence and solitude, they will not be able to persevere in the monastery. The vocation is both/and. By temperament each of us leans a little more toward one side than the other, especially in the early years of religious life. But the two cannot be separated. As enclosure is the container, the sacred space that holds the monastic package together, so silence is the atmosphere in which all the rest flourishes, the guardian of all regular observance (46:11).

We are silent in the first place in order to hear the Word of God: to participate fruitfully in the liturgy with our sisters; to be present to the text of the Scriptures when we sit alone for *lectio*, and to continue to ruminate on the Word throughout the day; to concentrate and to absorb doctrinal truths during our times of study; to be alert and awake to the promptings of the Holy Spirit deep within. This makes a lot of sense, even to a new aspirant fresh from the noisy world. But, as she will learn that community life is very demanding and calls forth radical changes in her attitudes and behavior, so she must encounter the great risk of silence.

We leave all things behind, we stop the wagging of the tongue. And then we discover the rowdy, inescapable portion of the world that has stowed away in our own hearts. This is the field of the true monastic labor, this is the world that the Dominican nun is called to evangelize. Ongoing conversion is like ongoing formation: it is a lifetime job. We know what happens when a gardener walks away from her plot of land and lets nature run its course.

Earlier I quoted St. Dominic's letter to the nuns of Madrid, about the suitable place for carrying out the life of observance. The preceding sentence tells us what he expected to happen within the confines of the monastic enclosure: "Wage war, my daughters, against the ancient enemy with prayer and fasting, for only those who strive lawfully shall receive the crown."

The observances are like the armor of God that St. Paul describes in several of his letters, "For we are not contending against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness...." (cf. Eph. 6:11-17; 1 Thess. 5:8).

The several parts are held together by silence and enclosure to form a seamless garment that resists penetration – by the enemy, or by anything else that seeks to divert us from our purpose.

If we follow the naked Christ into the desert, we should know that we follow him to the cross and death. Yes, the victory has been won for us, and the Lord is risen from the tomb. But St. Paul indicates in his Letter to the Colossians that there is something lacking in the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24). Only one thing could be lacking to the Passion of the only-begotten Son of God: that each of his members become utterly conformed to him through acceptance of suffering in obedience and love.<sup>13</sup> Why do we have to look further for ways in which we can meet the world? This is how we perpetuate that singular gift which our Father Dominic had of bearing sinners, the down-trodden and the afflicted in the inmost sanctuary of his compassion (LCM 35:I).

It is not simply a matter of intercessory prayer. Monastic life has an intrinsic value in itself. Our existence is not justified by "praying for the world," nor do we need to look for extrinsic forms of outreach. "As the Lord Jesus, the Savior of all, offered himself completely for our salvation, they consider themselves to be truly his members primarily when they are spending themselves totally for souls" (LCM 1:I,II). Monastic observance is above all an extension of the liturgy, the self-offering of Christ commemorated and made present for us in the Eucharist each day.<sup>14</sup> This is our life. Can the Christian world of the 21st century believe that God still has a right to his own portion of humanity, set aside solely as a sacrifice of praise?

For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake,  
so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death  
is at work in us, but life in you (2 Cor. 4:11-12).

## Truth and Freedom

Let me return one last time to the article by Mary David Todah. In her comments on the first papal decree of universal enclosure promulgated by Boniface VIII in 1298, she makes the following observation:

It has been said that Boniface's extension of strict enclosure to nuns of every Order – as well as the present legislation [here she refers to *Venite Seorsum*] – does not respect particular traditions and charisms. But it could be said that with this legislation, enclosure is placed at the service of each Order's particular charism.<sup>15</sup>

Todah goes on to give examples of the different accent on enclosure that appears in several traditions. For Pachomius – who held to quite a strict enclosure for both men and women in the fourth century – it was a way of realizing the *koinonia*. Those who entered the community passed from the world into a "holy fellowship." For Benedict, the enclosure creates the monastic school of the Lord's service. Carmelites embrace enclosure for the sake of their eremitical ideal. Poor Clares associate enclosure with Franciscan poverty.

I have tried to demonstrate in this paper how enclosure and silence are at the service of our Dominican monastic observance as a whole: they keep us in place and focused on the one thing necessary; they undergird our common life as we seek "to live in harmony, having one

mind and one heart in God" (LCM 2:1); they draw us ever more deeply into the Paschal Mystery, where we learn the greater love that lays down its own individual life for the life of the world.

But Dominican enclosure is more than this. It can be characterized by one sentence from John's Gospel: "If you continue [abide-dwell-remain] in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn. 8:31-32). The first thing that the Church declares to us in the new Catechism is that God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. This is exactly the purpose for which the Order of Preachers was founded, and this is why we can talk about a "Dominican Moment." This Moment does not concern only the friars. The first women converts who formed the nucleus of the foundation at Prouille approached St. Dominic after they heard his preaching. His words had shaken their confidence in the heretics and they were no longer sure what to believe. They begged him to enlighten them on the true doctrine; they wanted to be saved, to live and die in the true faith.<sup>16</sup>

Before all else, Dominican enclosure exists in the service of truth. Just as the preaching friar cannot be effective in his ministry without the separation, detachment and solitude required to devote himself to study, so the Dominican nun embraces enclosure and silence as indispensable means to the goal that Catherine of Siena lovingly refers to as gentle first Truth.

Our approach to truth is by way of stillness, the discipline of remaining rooted in one spot, digging ever deeper into the rich veins of the deposit of faith, ready to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). It is an approach that in many ways runs counter to the subjective, humanist bent in contemporary spirituality. There the accent is on the journey, movement, an uncritical openness and preference for whatever is new in the surrounding culture. The medieval mentality was able to draw all the arts and sciences into the service of faith and revelation. Today it is often the secular viewpoint that takes precedence and the Gospel ends up being reinterpreted accordingly.

These liberal trends were on the rise in the sixties and seventies, coinciding with the changes that were taking place in the Church after Vatican II. I recall reading a book around that time entitled *Never Trust a God over Thirty*. Religious communities have been deeply influenced by such popular ways of thinking, to the detriment of their own traditional values. Under the guise of fidelity to the spirit of the Council, this outlook actually represents a form of *aggiornamento* that has become divorced from *ressourcement*.<sup>17</sup>

If we look back at the changes that have occurred in our monasteries during the last thirty-five years, many of the most notable are related to silence and enclosure. Was this evolution influenced by cultural factors of which we are not sufficiently conscious? In our efforts at renewal and adaptation have we compromised some of the basic elements of Dominican monastic life? We could briefly reflect here on a few examples in specific areas.

– *Verbi Sponsa* states that leaving the enclosure requires a just and grave cause, that this is a requirement of consistency with the vocation we have chosen, and that every exit must constitute an exception.<sup>18</sup> The changes in our actual practice during the last thirty years and the underlying attitudes concerning enclosure do not seem to be in accord with this document. Are we willing to accept the responsibilities of papal enclosure? Do we understand the value that this observance still has for our contemplative life?



– Crossing the threshold is not the only way to be engaged with the outside world. We have become more and more available to family and friends through use of the telephone. A habit of regular and prolonged conversations is detrimental to the spirit of enclosure. It intrudes on that silence which is the guardian of all observance and is intended to free our minds for the things of God.

– And have we lost sight of the fact that silence is not only a personal discipline but also a support for our common life? The contemporary culture tells us that talking is therapeutic and that community relations are built up by dialogue and sharing. For women dedicated to a life of prayer speech does not have the priority. How can we hope to have one mind and heart in God unless each individual mind and heart is silent and free to turn in that direction?

– There are many ways to move out of the enclosure, but there is a converse problem with regard to those whom we receive into the enclosure. The presence of lay persons within the sacred space can call for social adaptations that undermine silence and the life of observance as a whole. Msgr. Mannion deals with this topic very perceptively in the articles we received as preparatory reading for the Assembly. If we let down all the barriers – not only the physical but the more subtle, ritual distancing as well – we are doing damage to our specific vocation in the Church.

My point here is not that we should turn back the clock and reinstall the double grilles. That would be neither feasible nor desirable. But we do have to take collective stock of the situation and evaluate with clear minds just where we have come from and where we are going. There are real tensions in evidence with regard to what Dominican monastic life is all about and how it should be lived. And yet our *Ratio Formationis* states that:

The Dominican tradition provides a coherent vision of truth and a distinctive body of practical Christian wisdom.... It is necessary to maintain a clear grasp of this tradition in its entirety so that it may not be obscured by currents of thought and spirituality alien to the spirit of the Order (RFG 9).

For Dominicans, doctrinal truth is personal truth, something to live by from day to day, something that forms the entire body-soul composite. The observances engrave the Word of God in our flesh, so that we can bear forth the truth in and to the world. God has intended us for himself, we have a capacity for God. Everything that we do is aimed at removing the obstacles that hide us from our true selves, made in the image and likeness of God. Both the Dominican and monastic traditions are very optimistic about achieving this transformation because it all depends on the grace of Christ. But we have to believe in it, be present to it, renounce our subjective agenda and allow ourselves to be stretched and formed by something larger than ourselves. If we wander away from the foundational principles of our life in order to meet the world, when we do make contact we will no longer have anything to give.

The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* proclaims that "the human being...can find fulfillment only in choosing to enter the truth, to make a home under the shade of wisdom and dwell there."<sup>19</sup> What all Dominicans have in common is a radical thirst for and commitment to the truth, both in life and in doctrine. The truth that is rooted in the Word of God and bears fruit in true freedom, the truth that is the way to eternal life.

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## NOTES

1. Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 29.
2. Simon Tugwell, Lectures on Dominican Sources and Dominican Life, Monastery of Our Lady of Grace, North Guilford, CT, July 1985.
3. Mary David Todah, O.S.B., "The Undivided Heart: Another Look at Enclosure," Cistercian Studies Quarterly 33.3 (1998).
4. Peter F. Anson, "Papal Enclosure," Cistercian Studies III.2 & 3 (1968).
5. Gerald Vann, O.P., "Jordan and Diana," *To Heaven with Diana! A Study of Jordan of Saxony and Diana d'Andalo with a Translation of the Letters of Jordan* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960) 21.
6. See translator's note in A.D. Sertillanges, O.P., *The Intellectual Life*, trans. Mary Ryan (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1962) 216.
7. *Vita Consecrata*, #63.
8. "Letter of St. Dominic to the Sisters of Madrid," *Early Documents of the Dominican Sisters*, vol. I (Summit, NJ: Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary, 1969) 1.
9. Todah, 347.
10. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., *Sing a New Song: The Christian Vocation* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1999) 43.
11. *John Cassian: The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P., no. 57 Ancient Christian Writers (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) 831-32.
12. Vann, Jordan's Letter 26, 105.
13. See Colman E. O'Neill, O.P., *Sacramental Realism*, Theology and Life Series 2 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983) 42ff.
14. See William Hood's treatment of Dominican observances in *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (London: BCA, 1993).
15. Todah, 358.
16. See R.P. Ranquet, O.P., *Prouilhe: aux sources de la vie contemplative dominicaine* (Carcassonne: Editions de L'Enclume, 1953) 21-22.
17. M. Francis Mannion, "Monasticism and Modern Culture: I. Hostility and Hospitality – Religious Community and 'the World'," American Benedictine Review 44:1 (March, 1993) 12. This is the first of three essays, all of which are pertinent to our topic. See also "II. The Cultural Conversion of Monks – Liberalism and Monastic Life" ABR 44:2 (June 1993); and "III. The Labor of Tradition – Monasticism as a Cultural System" ABR 44:3 (Sept. 1993).
18. *Verbi Sponsa*, #15.
19. *Fides et Ratio*, #107.

## VERBI SPONSA AND DOMINICAN MONASTIC LIFE

Fr. Reginald Whitt, O.P.  
Province of St. Joseph

On May 13, 1999, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life issued *Verbi sponsa*, an instruction specifically concerning the contemplative life and enclosure of nuns. *Verbi sponsa* is the second instruction the congregation has issued on this subject since the close of Vatican Council II,<sup>1</sup> and the first since the promulgation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law<sup>2</sup> and the 1986 Code-inspired revision of the Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers.<sup>3</sup> The first section of article 180 in the *LCM* provides that Dominican monasteries are governed “by all laws and decrees of the Church: common laws to which nuns are subject, laws issued for nuns, and those made for the nuns of the Order of Preachers.”<sup>4</sup> That provision suggests that the religious life of Dominican nuns is governed at least by the 1983 Code, by *Verbi sponsa* and by the *LCM*. But it does not indicate how those three legal instruments relate to each other (e.g., does one take priority over the others?), nor does it begin to describe how Dominican nuns are to put these laws into practice, as *LCM* 180 requires, “in the light of the Gospel and according to the mind of the Rule of St Augustine and the Fundamental Constitution of the Order.”

Now I have been invited to speak with you about *Verbi sponsa* and Dominican monastic life – and I was asked to do this specifically as a Dominican who is also a canonist. And I am happy to do so because – unbeknown to too many Catholics, including nuns! – canon law is a school of theology deserving lively examination. Canon law seeks to put into practice what we believe about our Church – the Body of Christ, the Sacrament of the Kingdom, the People of God – it seeks to realize what we confess in faith, to help every believer live out what we profess, to further our pilgrimage to God: because the Church’s supreme law is the same as our Order’s principal purpose, that is, the salvation of souls.<sup>5</sup>

So all of these legal norms – the Code, the *LCM* and *Verbi sponsa* – they are all designed to help us make the most of God’s grace. But of course, for the law to achieve its purpose, we have to understand it: from where does it come, to whom is it addressed, to whom does it apply and to what extent? Hence, for the next several minutes, I will do three things: (1) I will explain the nature of *Verbi sponsa* in the context of the Code of Canon Law and the *LCM*; (2) then I will look at the law of papal enclosure and show why it exists and its relation to the Dominican monastic tradition; and (3) I will reflect upon the ways in which *Verbi sponsa* encourages Dominican nuns to make the most of the unique monastic patrimony of the Order of Preachers.

### (1) The Nature of *Verbi sponsa* in the Context of the 1983 Code and the *LCM*

To properly appreciate the nature of *Verbi sponsa* requires that we engage ourselves in the legal life of the Church. As in political communities, law in the Church is directed to ordering the duties and rights of the members and providing the necessary and proper ways in which various community functions are to be performed. Also as in political societies, authority in the Church is exercised in the executive, legislative and judicial arenas.<sup>6</sup> Some groups in the Church (our Order, for example) confer executive and legislative power on different persons or bodies (priors/prioresses and chapters), comparable to the separation of powers in American government. However, those two powers along with the judicial are



conjoined in the office of a bishop,<sup>7</sup> since he is a successor of the Apostles on whom Christ conferred the sacred power to bind and loose.<sup>8</sup>

The Catholic Church is governed by her bishops, the successors of the Apostles to whom the Lord commended the evangelization and sanctification of all the nations. Our bishops are our pastors: they teach us sacred doctrine, they are priests of divine worship and they are ministers of governance; their three-fold pastoral authority (teaching, sanctifying and governing) is called their “episcopal power.” A *diocesan* bishop is one to whom the pastoral care of a diocese has been entrusted; those bishops not so entrusted are called *titular* bishops. Together, *all* the bishops comprise the College of Bishops, whose Head is the Roman Pontiff. A Catholic is any baptized person who is joined with Christ by the same profession of faith, the same sacraments and the ecclesiastical governance of such a bishop.<sup>9</sup>

The Bishop of Rome, who succeeds St Peter the Apostle in that office, is the patriarch of the Latin Catholic Church – that is, he is the spiritual father of the Catholic people whose basic liturgical language (still) is Latin and whose ecclesial heritage is derived from the apostolic church of Rome – in other words, *us*. The Order of Preachers is a religious institute of the Latin Catholic Church. The Bishop of Rome also holds the special ministry that Jesus Christ gave to St Peter (the “*petrine office*”): he is head of the College of Bishops, the Vicar of Christ and the Supreme Pastor of the universal Church on earth. He is the *Pope*. In virtue of the special petrine office, the pope has full, immediate and universal episcopal power in the Church.<sup>10</sup>

Selected groups (*synods*) of bishops assist the pope in exercising his petrine office, as do individual bishops in various ways.<sup>11</sup> Of particular importance in this regard are the bishops who belong to the *Roman Curia* – a complex of administrative, judicial and other *dicasteries*, which are similar to civil government cabinet departments, courts and agencies. The pope normally conducts the ministries and affairs of the universal Church through those dicasteries, and they act in his name and by his authority as provided by special law (which I will mention later). Customarily, the pope and the dicasteries of the Roman Curia as well – like the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life – , are spoken of generically or collectively as either the *Apostolic* or the *Holy See*.<sup>12</sup>

The entire College of Bishops, headed by and in hierarchical communion with the pope, *also* holds supreme and full pastoral power over the universal Church. This plenary collegial power is solemnly manifested and exercised by a council of bishops “from the whole world,” an *ecumenical council*. Once the pope confirms and promulgates the acts of such councils (i.e., announces them to the public and puts them into effect), those conciliar acts have obligatory legal force for every person, institute or practice to which they are addressed.<sup>13</sup>

The Church’s laws appear in a variety of forms and documents. *Apostolic constitutions* are the most solemn form of legislation issued by the pope in his own name. Dealing with doctrinal or disciplinary subjects, they are issued only with respect to very weighty matters affecting the Church at large or, e.g., by erecting a new diocese.<sup>14</sup> The 1983 Code was promulgated by such a constitution,<sup>15</sup> as was the 1991 Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches.<sup>16</sup> The most common source of papal legislation are the popes’ apostolic letters written *motu proprio* (literally “on his own initiative”). These legal texts deal with matters affecting the Church at large that do not, however, merit an apostolic constitution.<sup>17</sup>

The current apostolic constitutions, *motu proprios* and canon law codes reflect the doctrine and legislative policies of Vatican Council II, which were expressed in two types of

council documents: constitutions and decrees. The *constitutions* of the council<sup>18</sup> are fundamental documents addressed to the universal Church. The conciliar *decrees* build upon the principles established in the constitutions, and are specifically directed to a given apostolate<sup>19</sup> or to some distinct grouping of the faithful.<sup>20</sup> For our purposes today, the most important conciliar decree was that concerning the adaptation and renewal of religious life, *Perfectæ caritatis*.<sup>21</sup> These constitutions and decrees have legal content,<sup>22</sup> manifesting the legislative authority of the College of Bishops. In some instances (for example, in the constitution on the liturgy), the council explicitly declared new law. In most situations it formulated principles, criteria and desires that entailed more concrete expression in “new laws and instructions, in new organisms and offices, in spiritual, cultural and moral movements, and in organizations”<sup>23</sup> developed after the council and over a number of years. The chief and crowning product of that post-conciliar effort is the 1983 Latin code and its companion legislation, the 1991 Eastern code. But even these codes do not constitute the complete body of canon law in the Catholic Church. As we have already seen, continuing papal constitutions and *motu proprio*s add to that body. So do the legal documents produced by the other organs of the Holy See, by other lawmaking communities like religious institutes, and by bishops in their particular churches.

As instruments of papal governance, the dicasteries of the Roman Curia have been delegated executive authority within their diverse spheres of competence, which are governed by the 1988 apostolic constitution *Pastor bonus*.<sup>24</sup> The curial texts in which we most frequently find the dicasteries exercising their authority are decrees, instructions, declarations and circular letters.<sup>25</sup> The dicastery whose competence entails everything that the law commits to the Holy See regarding the life and work of religious institutes – approving their constitutions; their manner of government and apostolate; recruitment, formation, dispensation from vows and dismissal of their members – that is the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life. And it is that congregation which has given us *Verbi sponsa* which, I must first of all advise you, is not a law.

*Verbi sponsa* is an instruction which contains norms for the papal enclosure of nuns. Canon 34 tells us that an instruction is a document that clarifies the provisions of laws, and elaborates on and determines the methods to be observed in fulfilling those laws. An instruction is provided for the use of those persons who have the duty to see that the law is executed, and it obliges them in the execution of the laws. Regulations in instructions do not derogate from laws (they do not amend a law or lessen its force); and if an instruction’s ordinations cannot be reconciled with the provisions of the law, then those ordinations have no force.<sup>26</sup> Although the instruction *Verbi sponsa*, strictly speaking, is not a legislative text, it nonetheless provides papally-approved norms for executing canon 667 § 3 (the law of papal enclosure)<sup>27</sup> and which oblige the nuns, their superiors and their diocesan bishops.<sup>28</sup>

The kinds of canonical texts I have described – apostolic constitutions and *motu proprio*s from the pope, conciliar constitutions and decrees, and the normative instructions and other documents issued by dicasteries of the Holy See – constitute *universal laws* and norms. They bind everybody for whom they were passed, everywhere those people may be. For example, the 1983 Code applies to every Latin Catholic in the world. Its canons concerning individuals generally apply to all the Latin faithful; its provisions concerning consecrated life and the nature, governance, life and apostolates of religious institutes normally govern every religious community in the Latin Catholic Church. But there are exceptions: as canon 20 puts it, “a universal law in no way derogates” (annuls or subtracts) “from a *particular law* or a *special law*” unless the universal law itself expressly so provides.<sup>29</sup>

*Particular laws* address a specific territory or place, and the people in it: (1) the entire territory of an episcopal conference (the United States), or (2) an ecclesiastical province (the Province of Philadelphia, i.e., all the dioceses in Pennsylvania), or (3) an individual diocese. For example, the Latin Catholic people of the diocese of Allentown may be governed by particular laws promulgated by competent authorities, which apply to them *in addition to* (and sometimes in place of) the universal laws addressed to Latin Catholics throughout the world.

In contrast to universal canon law, which affects all the baptized or touches every kind of matter or activity in the Church, *special law* affects only a certain class or group of persons or touches only certain matters or activities. Special law differs from particular law because it refers to a community or activity without regard to any specific territory. For example, the structure and competency of the Roman Curia is defined by special law (c. 360): the apostolic constitution *Pastor Bonus* (1988).<sup>30</sup> Although the 1983 Code does not directly say so, it would seem that the *proper law* of an institute of consecrated life (e.g., the LCM and monastery directories), which applies to persons and not to territory, also falls within the category of special law.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, the 1983 Code *expects* religious institutes to have special law. Canon 578 provides that "the mind of the founders and their designs regarding the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute which have been sanctioned by competent ecclesiastical authority, as well as its sound traditions, all of which constitute the patrimony of the institute itself, are to be observed faithfully by all."<sup>32</sup> Canon 587 requires that the fundamental norms for the government of a religious institute, for the discipline of its members and their incorporation and formation, and for the proper object of their vows, these must be contained along with the minds of the founders and its sound traditions in the institute's constitutions – special law for each religious institute, which of course is what we have in the LCM.

So we have three pertinent and normative documents addressing papal enclosure, which is an aid to monastic observance to which all Dominican monasteries adhere: canon 667 is a universal law from our supreme legislator, the Roman Pontiff; LCM 37-40 provides the universal proper law for the nuns of the Order of Preachers, generated from the monastery chapters, compiled by the Master of the Order, and approved by the competent Holy See dicastery; and *Verbi sponsa* is an instruction from that dicastery, universally addressed to all contemplative nuns, their superiors and their bishops, supplying norms for the appropriate execution of canon 667. And, of course, all three texts apply to Dominican nuns: the only question to examine is "to what extent?" I believe the answer is, that canon 667 applies to the extent its provisions are not contrary to the LCM, and that the norms of *Verbi sponsa* apply to the extent they do not contradict *any* law.

Now only §§ 3 and 4 of canon 667 directly apply to contemplative women's monasteries. Section 3 of the canon first of all repeats the age-old law that cloister in monasteries of nuns entirely ordered to the contemplative life is observed according to norms given by the Holy See, namely, the monasteries must observe papal enclosure. Second, § 3 states that other nuns' monasteries are to observe cloister adapted to their character and defined in their proper law. The first clause of LCM 37 repeats the law of papal enclosure, and specifies that this enclosure is in accord with the norms provided by the 1969 instruction *Venite seorsum*. The second clause of LCM 37 provides that monasteries unable to observe papal enclosure because they engage in external apostolates observe cloister according to "their particular statutes" (inelegant language when speaking about the law of religious) which the Holy See must approve.



Section 4 of canon 667 provides diocesan bishops the “faculty” – a term that means executive power of governance – the canon gives him authority for any good reason to enter the cloisters of nuns in his diocese. And furthermore, for a serious reason and with the superior’s consent, the diocesan bishop has power to permit others to enter the cloister and nuns to leave it “for a truly necessary time.”<sup>33</sup> *LCM* 227 also authorizes diocesan bishops to give the permissions provided by canon 667; moreover, since *LCM* 227 deals with monasteries in which the Master of the Order, the local Prior Provincial or a friar delegated by one of them is the regular superior with the power of governance over the monastery,<sup>34</sup> § IV of *LCM* 227 gives that regular superior the same faculty to permit leaving and entering the enclosure – i.e., for a serious reason, with the superior’s consent and only for a truly necessary time.<sup>35</sup>

This is a case in which the proper law of the Order grants a faculty not given by universal church law (so-called “common law”); and since canon 667 does not expressly prohibit any special law extending its permissive faculty to authorities within the Order, canon 20 supports the validity of *LCM* 227 § IV. Stated another way, even if the language of canon 667 § 4 appears to limit this faculty to the diocesan bishop alone, that limitation does not apply to the Dominican nuns in virtue of their proper law.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas the legal provisions of canon 667 are fairly simple to compare to those of the *LCM*, the norms we find in *Verbi sponsa* are far more detailed and expansive. Canon 667 § 3 and *LCM* 37 each describe wholly contemplative and mixed monasteries in one article; *Verbi sponsa* uses three different provisions to do so: articles 10 and 11 for the wholly contemplative convents with papal enclosures, and article 12 for the others with “constitutional cloister.” It is noteworthy, however, that article 14 § 1 of *Verbi sponsa* acknowledges the variety of contemplative traditions among the institutes of nuns with papal enclosure, and that “some aspects of their separation from the world are left to particular [i.e., proper] law,” subject to the Holy See’s approval.

There is a substantial similarity between the provisions of *LCM* 38 and *Verbi sponsa* 14 § 2, concerning the precincts under papal enclosure: the choir, the church, the parlors and other places reserved to the nuns. Whereas *LCM* 38 uses the language of Pope Paul VI and speaks of effective “material separation,”<sup>37</sup> *Verbi sponsa* speaks of separation that is “physical and effective” to emphasize that it cannot be merely symbolic. Apparently, some monasteries broke cloister at liturgical celebrations: *Verbi sponsa* 14 § 2 expressly excludes such a practice. *LCM* 83 and 38 § 1 already provide that enclosure must be observed even during the liturgy. *Verbi sponsa* 14 § 3(a) is nearly a word-for-word match to *LCM* 39, and they mean the same thing: both active enclosure (whereby the members of the monastic community are not to go beyond the limits circumscribed by the enclosure) and passive enclosure (whereby no one else may enter the precincts of the enclosure) must be maintained, except in cases provided by law.

*Verbi sponsa* 15 and 16 recite policies reflected throughout the *LCM*, e.g., in articles 35, 40, 188 and 189: the entire monastic community is responsible for nurturing and protecting their enclosure for the sake of the common life, of prayer, of their vows and sacred study; entries and exits must be for good and serious reasons, weighed by the superior with prudence and discretion, and only permitted by her when needed for the sake of the wholly contemplative vocation,<sup>38</sup> that the purpose of the Order might be better attained.<sup>39</sup>

All this being said, *Verbi sponsa* 17 § 1 provides a list of ordinary cases in which a superior can give permission for a nun to leave the enclosure: any case involving the health of the nuns or the care of an infirm nun, to exercise civil rights and situations in which the needs

of the monastery cannot otherwise be provided for. Section 2 of this article authorizes the superior with the consent of either her council or the chapter, following the discipline of the constitutions, to permit a nun's departure for up to a week, "for other just and serious reasons." Should the time outside the monastery need an extension beyond the week for as much as three months, the superior must obtain the permission of either the diocesan bishop (pursuant to canon 667 § 4) or the regular superior; in the case of an absence for more than three months, unless it involves a case of health care, she must seek the permission of the Holy See. This procedure is also to be used in cases involving nuns taking part in religious-formation courses organized among monasteries, because canon 665 § 1 (whereby major superiors can permit a member to live outside a house of the institute for up to a year for purposes of studies) does not apply to cloistered nuns. Moreover, *Verbi sponsa* 17 § 3 provides that, just as in cases<sup>40</sup> of temporary or definitive transfers to other monasteries of the order, when it is necessary to send novices or professed nuns to another monastery of the order for purposes of formation, the superior gives her consent after the intervention of either the council or the chapter, following the constitutions.

I have three observations about *Verbi sponsa* 17 in the context of the Code and the *LCM*. First of all, this part of the instruction provides specific norms for papal enclosure found nowhere else, complementing canon 667 § 3 and giving further substance to *LCM* 37. In particular, the procedure in article 17 § 2, for a superior to permit extended departures from the enclosure, requires shared governance, in the spirit of the Rule of St Augustine and according to the *LCM*. *Verbi sponsa* requires either the council or the chapter to advise the superior before she can act. *LCM* 216 § 1.8 would appear to apply to this procedure: it provides that the council must give its consent whenever a serious matter must be referred to a local ordinary, the regular superior or the Holy See.<sup>41</sup> A nun's extended departure from the enclosure for reasons other than health is certainly a serious matter, as must be the reasons for permitting such a leave, and the norms provide that, if this departure may foreseeably extend beyond a week, the permissive faculty of the diocesan bishop or regular superior must be invoked; and if beyond three months, the permission of the Holy See. Obviously, no authority outside the monastery community is required for a superior to permit a departure for up to a week, but *Verbi sponsa* binds her to consult with and get the consent of either the chapter or the council. The *LCM* already puts the question of longer departures within the scope of the council's deliberative vote: they might as well advise the superior about the shorter departures.

Another matter for consultation arises under *Verbi sponsa* 17 § 3: sending novices or nuns in temporary vows to another monastery for formation. The instruction requires some intervention (either consultative or deliberative) by either the council or the chapter, depending on what the constitutions provide in cases of temporary or definitive translocation. Well, it's not an either-or question in the *LCM*: articles 176 § II.2 and 178 § I.2 both require a consenting (deliberative) majority of *both* bodies.<sup>42</sup>

My third observation concerns the relationship between the involvement of diocesan bishops and regular superiors in the departures envisioned in *Verbi sponsa* 17 § 2 and their permissive faculties in canon 667 § 4 and *LCM* 227 § IV. *Verbi sponsa* 21 purports to limit the authority of a diocesan bishop and a regular superior to permit a nun's departure from enclosure only to the particular cases provided in the instruction itself.<sup>43</sup> This it cannot do. As we have already seen, canon 667 § 4 gives a diocesan bishop the *unrestricted* power to permit nuns to leave the cloister for a truly necessary time for a serious reason. *LCM* 227 § IV provides that either the diocesan bishop or the regular superior may give the habitual or special permissions for leaving the enclosure in accord with canon 667 § 4; hence, under the special and proper law

of the Dominican nuns, the regular superior enjoys the same unrestricted right as a diocesan bishop. *Verbi sponsa* 17 § 2 limits the authority of a prioress to authorize a nun's departure from the enclosure beyond one week, by requiring that she obtain permissions from the bishop or regular superior, or from the Holy See, depending on the foreseeable duration of the departure. But *Verbi sponsa* 17 § 2 cannot restrict the rights of the bishop or the regular superior to the terms of the prioress's authority. The article's footnote reference to canon 667 § 4 merely indicates the source of a diocesan bishop's power to give the prioress authority to allow a nun to leave the enclosure for up to three months. Such a reading of the footnote is necessary since, by restricting the bishop's right freely to delegate his plenary power to a prioress to permit a nun's leaving the enclosure, the instruction must be strictly construed.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, *Verbi sponsa* is merely an instruction, which cannot derogate from universal or proper law.<sup>45</sup> Hence, although it makes limited provisions for a prioress to permit a nun to leave the enclosure, *Verbi sponsa* 17 § 2 does not address the canonical authority of a Dominican monastery's diocesan bishop or of its constitutional regular superior; its attempt to do so in article 21 lacks any legal force.

## **(2) Papal Enclosure and the Dominican Monastic Tradition**

Although the 6th-century *Rule for Nuns* of St. Ceasarius of Arles was the first explicit rule for women to impose cloister as such, the law of enclosure in the Latin church dates from St. Augustine's 4th-century instructions to consecrated virgins, that they remain in their homes separated from the world. That being said, the Rule of St. Caesarius contains all the elements adopted by Pope Boniface VIII when he first established papal enclosure in the 1298 constitution, *Periculoso*.<sup>46</sup>

By the 9th century, the standard expression of women's consecrated life was the pursuit of perfection according to the evangelical counsels within the monastic enclosure. In the religiously-explosive culture of the 13th century, the impulse to establish enclosed monasteries of women – Cistercian, Franciscan, as well as Dominican – also expressed an impulse to identify orthodox Catholics from marginal sectarians, because the women founders themselves (e.g., Clare of Assisi, Cecilia Cesarini & Diana d'Andolò) sought to identify their communities with the men seeking to live the evangelical apostolic life. Among the men, active enclosure was more lenient, because the monks and friars had pastoral duties (including spiritual care of nuns) that required frequent departures from the cloister. Within the women's communities, strict enclosure was the rule, not the exception.

In giving universal directions for the monastic enclosure of nuns, Pope Boniface did nothing more than extend to all nuns what the Poor Clares, for example, had already been observing since 1219 (under the "Ugolino Rule" of Pope Gregory IX). In his 1220 letter to the nuns in Madrid, St Dominic himself prescribed that they "[l]et none of the sisters go outside the gate, and let nobody come in, except for the bishop" or some other prelate, to visitate or preach to them.<sup>47</sup> In fact, *Periculoso* appears to have been modeled largely on the considerable body of existing recent monastic legislation for women,<sup>48</sup> which had deep historical roots in the Western Church. The 1264 rule of the Poor Clares began by describing their life as "living in obedience, without property, and in chastity, under enclosure"<sup>49</sup> Unauthorized egress was only permitted when "inevitable and dangerous necessity" – such as fire or hostile attack – made it impossible to gain the permission required from the Poor Clares' cardinal protector, whose very



appointment indicates that the Franciscan nuns were bound by cloister regulations issued and monitored by the Holy See.<sup>50</sup>

In 1298 *Periculoso* provided that all nuns, no matter what rule they observed and no matter where their monasteries were located, were to be perpetually cloistered. Except for the contagiously sick who would endanger the lives of the other nuns, sisters were under no circumstances to break the law of papal enclosure – either by leaving it themselves, or by inviting unauthorized others in. To avoid draining their limited assets, convents with resources inadequate to support their members – except for mendicant communities – were to accept no further postulants.<sup>51</sup> The new law authorized local bishops and other prelates to enforce these provisions, even in monasteries immediately subject to the protection of the Holy See. Any who disregarded this law would incur not only ecclesiastical sanctions, but secular penalties as well.<sup>52</sup>

The creation of papal enclosure manifested the pope's pastoral concern that nuns be able to live a cloistered, well-regulated life, appropriate to their vocation. It displayed both a willingness to mitigate the harshness of the cloister rules when warranted, and the intent to denounce behavior that failed to meet their standards. There were many reasons for creating and maintaining a universal law of papal enclosure for nuns of different communities:

- ◆ to protect nuns from random attacks and rape;
- ◆ to diminish, if not completely remove, worldly temptations so that “nuns [might] be able to serve God freely, wholly separated from the public and worldly gaze”,<sup>53</sup>
- ◆ to protect their autonomy and economic self-sufficiency to “sustain [their] members with goods and revenues, and without penury”,<sup>54</sup>
- ◆ to keep nuns from roving about, and pushy benefactors and others from intruding on their solitude;
- ◆ and to provide the nuns with the pastoral protection and guidance that *all too frequently* the men's communities connected with them either avoided or refused to give.

Bl Jordan of Saxony maintained an extensive correspondence with Bl Diana d'Andolò, from 1223 until she died in 1236: but he and the general chapters refused to affiliate her convent to the Order until 1227 – when Pope Honorius II ordered it be done. Successive general chapters of Cistercians, Franciscans and Dominicans forbade their Orders' further accepting new monasteries of nuns: they raised continuing objections, that developing the apostolate for nuns would absorb and distract their energies; Dominicans especially complained that the spiritual care of nuns diverted them from university studies.<sup>55</sup> By 1242, the nuns at Prouille and Madrid complained that the Friars Preachers had abandoned them to secular priests – and the Dominican general chapter of that very same year forbade all friars from giving the last sacraments to nuns, or from acting as their spiritual directors. The friars were forbidden to translate scriptures, or sermons, or conferences into the vernacular for the nuns. After the pope compelled the friars to take on a string of German monasteries, in 1252 they appealed to restrict their services to Prouille and San Sisto.<sup>56</sup>

Papal enclosure is the pontifical guarantee that the enclosure observance entrusted to you by St Dominic himself remains yours to keep. Papal enclosure is designed to protect and give you space to nurture your contemplative vocation, and to defend your monastic autonomy.

I hate to admit this, but time and again, the friars have been inclined to complain about the first and to disregard the second.

Now this should not be all that surprising, because you're not like us. We have the same father – we are Dominic's children – but like most families with more than one offspring, the children may resemble each other, but they are not the same. We have a common patrimony from Our Holy Father Dominic: the service of the Word in liturgical prayer, sacred study, silence and contemplation; the Rule of St Augustine, the common life, evangelical poverty, fraternal charity, the Preacher's habit, the rosary and our saints – they belong to us all. But the enclosure and the monastic life it entails, that is the nuns' unique Dominican inheritance. And for nearly 700 years, the episcopal power of the universal church has guaranteed your right to keep it.

In fact, *Verbi sponsa* 26 goes to some effort to emphasize that, even when nuns' monasteries are associated with a corresponding institute of men, the juridical autonomy of the monasteries must be respected and the discipline of enclosure maintained, so that our common spirituality might flourish as the nuns express it uniquely in a manner entirely consistent with their contemplative charism. Reciprocal rights and duties between our two branches of the Order must be defined to safeguard the effective autonomy of each monastery. In fact, in a rare gasp of "women's consciousness," *Verbi sponsa* expressly directs that the juridical supervision of nuns by male superiors must be conducted in such a way that, without improper submission to the men, the nuns make decisions about all that concerns their religious life with freedom of spirit and a sense of responsibility.

### **(3) *Verbi sponsa* and the Unique Dominican Monastic Patrimony**

So then, what are we to make of *Verbi sponsa*? It manifestly reaffirms – it *celebrates* – the unique calling and transcendent value of the cloistered contemplative vocation. The norms of enclosure are really not about walls and doors, or about going in or going out: the norms are about *sacred space*: the visibly marked and invisibly enriching environment that nourishes the personal and communal ambience to which monasteries have a right, so they can live their truly counter-cultural and eschatological vocation – free for God alone, in autonomous monasteries – historically the most authentic locus for the contemplative charism, even with respect to men, viz., Carthusians and Trappists. *Verbi sponsa* provides specific norms for the practical regulation of enclosure "so that it may better suit the *range* of contemplative institutes and the *various* monastic traditions."<sup>57</sup>

Now many of you have observed that the theological introduction to *Verbi sponsa* is redolent of the Carmelite sensibility – which to my mind indicates not only that the Carmelite nuns were the image in the mind of the congregation's scribes, but also that the Dominican monastic tradition must undertake clearly to express its own diversity, to educate your diocesan bishops, the friars and, yes, even the Holy See.

Despite its prejudice toward Carmel, *Verbi sponsa* must be read in the context of the Church's teaching documents and the universal law. *Perfectæ caritatis* is deliberately generic, because the ecumenical council knew that each religious institute has its own special characteristics; more recently, the pope acknowledges the same rich diversity in *Vita consecrata*.<sup>58</sup> The Code of Canon Law also is deliberately generic – and, repeating the mandate of *Perfectæ caritatis*, the code insists that each religious institute must identify their founders' spirit and special goals, and the sound traditions that give them their unique internal cultures – because that patrimony must animate your law, your observance and your life.

So transcend the "Carmelite stench" in *Verbi sponsa*, remembering that it too is a generic universally-addressed instruction. The Holy See *expects* each monastic institute of women to bring their own patrimony, tradition and culture to give life to these universal norms, in their own constitutions, directories and customary books. Glean from *Verbi sponsa* all that speaks to your Dominican patrimony, and imbue those principles with your Dominican monastic genius.

The patrimony is yours to keep. Amen. Alleluia!

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## NOTES

1. Under the name Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, it issued the instruction on the contemplative life and on the enclosure of nuns *Venite seorsum*, on August 15, 1969.
2. See *Codex Iuris Canonici. Fontium annotatione et indice Analytico-Alphabetico Auctus* [hereafter, the "Latin code" or "1983 Code" and merely cited by canon, "c."], auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1989).
3. See BOOK OF THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE NUNS OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS (English trans. of *Liber Constitutionum Monialium Ordinis Prædicatorum*) [hereafter, "LCM"] (1987).
4. LCM 180 § 1.
5. See c. 1752: "... præ oculis habita salute animarum, quæ in Ecclesia suprema semper lex esse debet."
6. See c. 135.
7. See, for example, c. 391 (concerning diocesan bishops).
8. See Mt 16:19, 18:18; John 20:23.
9. See cc. 375; 204-205.
10. See cc. 330-333.
11. See cc. 334 and 349.
12. See c. 360.
13. See cc. 336-339 and 341.
14. See generally Francis G. Morrissey, O.M.I., *Papal and Curial Pronouncements: Their Canonical Significance in Light of the 1983 Code of Canon Law*, 2d ed. rev. by M. Thériault (Ottawa: St. Paul Univ. 1995).
15. John Paul II, Ap. const. *Sacræ disciplinæ leges*, Jan. 25, 1983, *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis* (hereafter, "AAS") 75 (1983-II) VII-XIV.
16. John Paul II, Ap. const. *Sacri canones*, Oct. 18, 1990, AAS 82 (1990) 1033-1044. And since the promulgation of the 1983 Code, the pope has issued several significant constitutions to complement general provisions of its canons. E.g., John Paul II, Ap. const. *Divinus perfectionis Magister*, Jan. 25, 1983, AAS 75 (1983) 349-55, complements c. 1403 § 1 on causes of beatification and canonization; Ap. const. *Pastor bonus*, June 28, 1988, AAS 80 (1988) 841-923, complements c. 360 and reorganizes the Roman Curia; Ap. const. *Spirituali militum curæ*, April 21, 1986, AAS 78 (1986) 481-86, complements c. 569 on military chaplains and provides for military ordinariates; Ap. const. *Ex corde Ecclesiæ*, August 15, 1990, AAS 82 (1990) 1475-1509, complements cc. 807-814 on Catholic institutions of higher education.



17. Following the promulgation of the 1983 code, for example, the *motu proprio Recognitio iuris canonici*, Jan. 24, 1984, AAS 76 (1984) 433-434, established the commission for its authentic interpretation; more recently, Pope John Paul II amended both the Latin and Eastern codes by the *motu proprio Ad tuendam fidem*, May 18, 1998, AAS 90 (1998) 457-61.
18. There are four: two dogmatic constitutions, on the Church *Lumen gentium*, Nov. 21, 1964, AAS 57 (1965) 5-67, and on divine revelation *Dei Verbum*, Nov. 18, 1965, AAS 58 (1966) 817-35; the constitution on the sacred liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Dec. 4, 1963, AAS 56 (1964) 97-134; and the pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et spes*, Dec. 7, 1965, AAS 58 (1966) 1025-1115.
19. For example, the decrees on the apostolate of the laity *Apostolicam actuositatem*, Nov. 18, 1965, AAS 58 (1966) 837-864, on the Church's missionary activity *Ad gentes*, Dec. 7, 1965, AAS 58 (1966) 947-990, and on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, Nov. 21, 1964, AAS 57 (1965) 90-112.
20. See, for example, the decrees on the Eastern churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, Nov. 21, 1964, AAS 57 (1965) 76-85, and on the pastoral office of bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, Oct. 28, 1965, AAS 58 (1966) 673-696.
21. Vatican Council II, Decree on the adaptation and renewal of religious life *Perfectæ caritatis*, October 28, 1965, AAS 58 (1966) 702-712. Particularly salient provisions of the decree with respect to nuns are as follows:
  2. The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time. This renewal, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church, must be advanced according to the following principles:
    - a) Since the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels, let this be held by all institutes as the highest rule.
    - b) It redounds to the good of the Church that institutes have their own particular characteristics and work. Therefore let their founders' spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions--all of which make up the patrimony of each institute--be faithfully held in honor. ...
  4. An effective renewal and adaptation demands the cooperation of all the members of the institute. ... For the adaptation and renewal of convents of nuns, suggestions and advice may be obtained also from the meetings of federations or from other assemblies lawfully convoked. ...
  7. *Communities which are entirely dedicated to contemplation, so that their members in solitude and silence, with constant prayer and penance willingly undertaken, occupy themselves with God alone, retain at all times, no matter how pressing the needs of the active apostolate may be, an honorable place in the Mystical Body of Christ, whose "members do not all have the same function" (Rm 12:4). For these offer to God a sacrifice of praise which is outstanding. Moreover, the manifold results of their holiness lend luster to the People of God which is inspired by their example and which gains new members by their apostolate which is as effective as it is hidden. Thus they are revealed to be a glory of the Church and a wellspring of heavenly graces. Nevertheless, their manner of living should be revised according to the principles and criteria of adaptation and renewal mentioned above. However, their withdrawal from the world and the exercises proper to the contemplative life should be preserved with the utmost care....*
  16. *Papal cloister should be maintained in the case of nuns engaged exclusively in the contemplative life. However, it must be adjusted to conditions of time and place and obsolete practices suppressed.* This should be done after due consultation with the monasteries in question. But other nuns applied by rule to apostolic work outside the convent should be exempted from papal cloister in order to enable them better to fulfill the apostolic duties entrusted to them. Nevertheless, cloister is to be maintained according to the prescriptions of their constitutions. AAS 58 (1966) 703-710, emphasis added).
22. This is made plain by the *vacationes legum* – delays in implementation – ordered, e.g., for some of the prescriptions of *Perfectæ caritatis*. See Paul VI, m.p. *Munus apostolicum*, June 10, 1966, AAS 58 (1966) 465-466. The *motu proprio Ecclesiæ sanctæ*, II, arts. 30-32, August 6, 1966, AAS 58

(1966) 780-781, implemented many of the provisions of *Perfectæ caritatis* and specifically addressed the enclosure of nuns, reinforcing papal enclosure and abolishing minor enclosure.

23. Paul VI, Alloc., Aug. 17, 1966, AAS 58 (1966) 800. For example, *Perfectæ caritatis*, art. 1, explicitly states that "the sacred synod lays down the following prescriptions ... meant to state only the general principles of the adaptation and renewal of the life and discipline of religious orders ... . Particular norms for the proper explanation and application of these principles are to be determined after the council by the authority in question." AAS 58 (1966) 703.
24. See *Pastor bonus*, art. 14, AAS 80 (1988) 863.
25. The 1983 only defines decrees and instructions. See cc. 29-34. General decrees contain common prescriptions and "are issued by a competent legislator for a community capable of receiving a law"; they are laws properly speaking and are governed by the prescriptions of the canons on laws. C. 29. Under c. 30, those who possess only executive power are not able to issue the general decree mentioned in can. 29, "unless in particular cases such power has expressly been granted to them by a competent legislator in accord with the norm of law and the conditions stated in the act of the grant have been observed." E.g., *Pastor bonus*, art. 108, provides that the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life "deals with everything that, in accordance with the law, belongs to the Holy See" concerning the life and work of religious institutes, "especially the approval of their constitutions." Because an institute's constitutions are laws, this provision expressly grants the congregation power to issue a general decree which constitutes a legislative act. See Morrissey, *Papal and Curial Pronouncements*, 26.

General executory decrees are promulgated by publication in the AAS. C. 31 § 2. They are *not* laws, as such, but more precisely determine the methods to be observed in applying a law or urge the observance of laws. General executory decrees oblige those who are bound by the laws whose methods of application such decrees determine or whose observance they urge. Those who possess executive power are able to issue such decrees within the limits of their competency, e.g., the pertinent Holy See dicastery. Even if they are published in directories or in documents having some other title, general executory decrees do not derogate from laws – i.e., they neither amend nor supercede any law – and the prescriptions of such decrees that are contrary to laws have no force. Cc. 31-33. Concerning declarations, circular letters and directories, see Morrissey, *Papal and Curial Pronouncements*, 29-36.
26. C. 34: "§ 1. Instructiones, quæ nempe legum præscripta declarant atque rationes in iisdem exsequendis servandas evolvunt et determinant, ad usum eorum dantur quorum est curare ut leges executioni mandentur, eosque in legum executione obligant; eas legitime edunt, intra fines suæ competentiæ, qui potestate executiva gaudent. § 2. Instructionum ordinationes legibus non derogant, et si quæ cum legum præscriptis componi nequeant, omni vi carent." Instructions also cease to have force through their explicit or implicit revocation by the competent authority who issued them or by the same authority's superior, and also through the cessation of the law for whose clarification or execution they were given. *Ibid.*, § 3.
27. See c. 667 § 3: "Monasteries of nuns which are ordered entirely to the contemplative life must observe *papal* cloister, that is, according to norms given by the Apostolic See. Other monasteries of nuns are to observe cloister adapted to their proper character and defined in the constitutions" (emphasis in original: "*clausuram papalem*").
28. See *Verbi sponsa*, §§ 16 & 21; c. 615.
29. See c. 20: "A later law abrogates or derogates from an earlier law if it states so expressly, is directly contrary to it, or if it completely reorders the entire matter of the earlier law; but a universal law in no way derogates from a particular or special law unless the law expressly provides otherwise."
30. C. 569 provides that military chaplains are to be governed by special laws: i.e., the 1986 apostolic constitution *Spirituali militum curæ*, establishing the military ordinariates. That constitution further provides that each military ordinariate is to be governed according to additional special law: its own pontifically issued statutes. See *Spirituali militum curæ*, art. I § 1, AAS 78 (1986) 482. Several

canons of the 1983 code explicitly refer to special law. Special laws must provide for the governance of the universal Church and the attendant powers of the College of Cardinals when the Roman See is vacant or entirely impeded (cc. 335; 359): e.g., the apostolic constitution *Universi Dominici gregis*, Feb. 22, 1996, AAS 88 (1996) 305-43. The Synod of Bishops is governed by special law (c. 348 § 1): the *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum celebrandæ recognitus et auctus*, June 24, 1969, AAS 61 (1969) 525-39, amended August 20, 1971, AAS 63 (1971) 702-04; likewise, each episcopal conference (c. 448 § 2).

31. See cc. 586-587: "C. 586 – §1. A due autonomy of life, especially of governance, is recognized for each institute, by which they enjoy their proper discipline in the Church and are able to preserve their own patrimony intact as mentioned in can. 578. §2. It belongs to local ordinaries to safeguard and protect this autonomy"; "C. 587 – §1. To protect more faithfully the proper vocation and identity of each institute, the fundamental code or constitutions of every institute must contain, besides what must be observed according to can. 578, fundamental norms regarding governance of the institute, the discipline of members, incorporation and formation of members, and the proper object of sacred bonds. §2. A code of this kind is approved by the competent authority of the Church and can be changed only with its consent. §3. In this code spiritual and juridic elements are to be joined together suitably; nevertheless, norms are not to be multiplied unless it is necessary. §4. Other norms established by the competent authority of an institute are to be collected suitably in other codes and, moreover can be reviewed appropriately and adapted according to the needs of places and times." See Morrissey, *Papal and Curial Pronouncements*, 42-43.
32. C. 578.
33. See c. 667 § 4: "Episcopus diœcesanus facultatem habet ingrediendi, iusta de causa, intra clausuram monasteriorum monialium, quæ sita sunt in sua diœcesi, atque permittendi, gravi de causa et assistente Antistita, ut alii in clausuram admittantur, ac moniales ex ipsa egrediantur *ad tempus vere necessarium*" (emphasis added).
34. See c. 614 provides that "Monasteries of nuns which are associated with an institute of men maintain their own order of life and governance according to the constitutions. Mutual rights and obligations are to be so defined that the association is spiritually enriching." These "614 monasteries" are distinguished from those described in c. 615: "An autonomous monastery which has no other major superior beyond its own moderator and is not associated with any other institute of religious in such a way that the superior of the latter enjoys true power over such a monastery determined by the constitutions is committed to the special vigilance of the diocesan bishop according to the norm of law." See, e.g., *LCM* 228.
35. See *LCM* 227: "In monasteries referred to in n. 174 § II ['In some monasteries the Master of the Order or the Prior Provincial enjoys power determined in these Constitutions']: § I. The regular superior is either the Master of the Order, the Prior Provincial, or a friar delegated by them. § II. The regular superior has power according to the norms of common and particular law over all the nuns of the monasteries under his jurisdiction. He can command them by virtue of the vow of obedience. ... § IV. It pertains to the diocesan bishop or to the regular superior to give either habitual or special permissions according to the norms of the law (cf. c. 667 §§ 3-4) for leaving and entering the enclosure."
36. Likewise, the provision of *LCM* 228 § II.2, extending the faculty to local ordinaries other than diocesan bishops may be an application of c. 20. *LCM* 228 deals with c. 615 monasteries (i.e., those not in any jurisdictional relationship with the friars and committed to the special vigilance of the diocesan bishop). See also *Venite seorsum*, § 7(c), which expressly refers to local ordinaries giving such permissions, and from which the constitutional provision probably arises. The express reference in c. 667 § 4 to a "diocesan bishop" *excludes other local ordinaries*. See c. 134 § 3 ("Whatever things in the canons in the realm of executive power which are attributed by name to a diocesan bishop are understood to pertain only to a diocesan bishop and to others equivalent to him in c. 381 § 2, excluding the vicar general and the episcopal vicar unless they have received a special mandate"). Vicars general and episcopal vicars are local ordinaries. See c. 134 §§ 1-2. As it is contrary to c. 667, the instruction *Venite seorsum*, § 7(c) could not amend the law nor itself be



enforceable. See c.34 § 2, *supra*, note 26. However, as special law, the proper law of the Order *can* make provisions that differ from the common law that are not expressly forbidden. See c. 20.

37. See *Ecclesiæ sanctæ*, II, art. 31, AAS 58 (1966) 780.
38. See *Verbi sponsa* 16 § 1; LCM 35 § III.
39. See LCM 188.
40. The official English translation of the phrase "*sicut et ad translationes temporales aut perpetuas*" errs in saying "*and to effect temporary or definitive transfers*"; the official Italian translation more accurately says "*as it is to effect temporary or definitive transfers*" ("*così come per effettuare trasferimenti temporanei o definitivi*"). The important matter is that either the council or chapter vote on the nun's departure, not that the superior consent; in the case of transfilations, the superior's consent is not required, but that of the nun who is to be transferred. See, e.g., LCM 176 § II.1.
41. The pertinent part of LCM 216 § I provides as follows: "In addition to cases determined by common law or particular statutes, the vote of the council is deliberative ... ( 8) whenever a serious matter must be referred to the local ordinary or the regular superior or the Holy See."
42. See LCM 176 § II: "For a nun to pass to another monastery of the Order by way of definitive trans-filiation after the time indicated in the directories, the following are required: 1) the consent of the nun herself; 2) the consent of the majority of the council and chapter of both monasteries ..."; and 178 § I: "The temporary transfer of any nun to another monastery of the Order requires: 1) the consent of the nun herself; [and] 2) the consent of the majority of the council and chapter of both monasteries."
43. See *Verbi sponsa*, art. 21, clause 2: "The Diocesan Bishop or the regular Superior do not ordinarily intervene in the granting of dispensations from enclosure, *but only in particular cases, as provided for in the present Instruction* (sed dumtaxat peculiaribus in casibus secundum hanc ipsam instructionem)" (emphasis added).
44. See cc. 137 § 1 ("Ordinary executive power can be delegated both for a single act and for all cases, unless the law expressly provides otherwise"); 138 ("Ordinary executive power as well as power delegated for all cases is to be broadly interpreted; any other is to be strictly interpreted; however, a person who has received delegated power is understood to have also been granted whatever is necessary to exercise that power"); see also c. 18 ("Laws which ... restrict the free exercise of rights or which contain an exception to the law are subject to a strict interpretation").
45. See c. 34 §2: "Regulations found in instructions do not derogate from laws, and if any of them cannot be reconciled with the prescriptions of laws, they lack all force." *Verbi sponsa* does not recite any language indicating that the issuing congregation received explicit delegation either to derogate from universal or proper law, or to render an authentic interpretation of any law; indeed, the instruction contains no derogating language. See Sr. Elizabeth McDonough, O.P., "Cloister for Nuns: From the 1917 Code to the 1994 Synod," *Review for Religious* 54 (1995) 772-778, addressing the question of whether *Venite seorsum* restricted a diocesan bishop's power to permit a departure from enclosure, and reaching a similar negative conclusion.
46. Boniface VIII, Constitution *Periculoso* (1298), in VI 3.16 *De statu regularium* c. 1.
47. St. Dominic de Guzmán, Letter (May, 1220), trans. in *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings*, Simon Tugwell, O.P., ed. (New York: The Paulist Press, 1982) 394.
48. E.g., the general chapter legislation of the Cisterians and the 1264 papal rule of the Poor Clares. See generally Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: PERICULOSO and Its Commentators*, Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law, vol. 5 (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997) 31-37.
49. "... vivendo in obedientia, sine proprio, et in castitate, sub clausura." Urban IV, Bull *Beata Clara*, cap. I, BULLARIUM ROMANUM vol. 3, 710.
50. See *ibid.*, cap. II, op. cit., 710.

51. Cf. *Early Dominicans*, 394: St. Dominic wrote the Madrid monastery that, "Because we can offer you no help in temporal ffairs, we do not want to burden you by allowing any of the brethren any authority to receive women or make them members of your community; only the prioress shall have such authority, on the advice of the community."
52. See VI 3.16.1 and .4.
53. *Periculoso*, VI 3.16, trans. Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 135.
54. *Ibid.*, VI 3.16.1, op. cit., 136.
55. See generally Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) 314-315.
56. See *ibid.*, 316.
57. *Verbi sponsa*, art. 2 (emphasis added).
58. See John Paul II, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata*, March 25, 1996, arts. 5-11.



## COMMON LIFE IN THE DOMINICAN TRADITION: AN ENDURING OBSERVANCE IN THE UNITY OF THE TRIUNE GOD.

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### I. Introduction

Thank you for inviting me to be part this General Assembly 2000 and for the opportunity to explore with you the historical and theological principles which underlie our observance of Common Life - the first of the observances listed in our Constitutions. My personal appreciation for Dominican Common Life has grown tremendously through study of the sources in preparation for this talk and most especially by missing its blessings over the past four months since the death of my Father. If I speak to you then with a certain urgency and intensity about Common Life it is precisely because of having had to live for a time apart from the Dominican *Communio*. Isn't it true that we often understand and truly appreciate a gift only through the experience of its loss? The scripture that came to mind most often during this time apart is Jesus' parable of the sower. The seed sown among thorns are those who listen to the Word but the cares and anxieties over life's demands choke it off and it bears no fruit. For most of the world much of life's energies are absorbed by the cares and anxieties and myriads of problems that befall them. Yet, we, in helping to carry one another's burdens in Common Life are thereby freed from much of this. Taking our brothers and sisters in the Order for granted is unfortunately easy enough to do. Yet living a life wholly intent upon God, free for God alone would be nearly impossible without each one of them. Every individual's contribution toward the common good makes the goal possible and attainable for all. The main purpose for your having come together is to live harmoniously in our house, *intent upon God* in oneness of mind and heart.<sup>1</sup>

Let us begin then with a beautiful prayer of St. Augustine:

*"Make me know, O God, those wise men and women who are Yours;  
souls of fire, sparkling with light.  
May it be to them that I bind myself in your Body in the fraternal Common Life,  
with them that I associate, with them that I rejoice in You,  
Who take pleasure in taking rest in them." Amen.*<sup>2</sup>

The theme of this Assembly: "Dwelling in the Inmost Life of God" pertains especially to this observance for we know that the inmost life of God is one of Trinitarian communion in love. The Lord Jesus revealed to us that the One God is not isolated nor self-absorbed but a personal communion: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To be created in the image of God is, among other things, to be created for personal communion, a communion which is intended to reach it's fullest expression in the Dominican Common Life. *Gaudium et Spes* hinted at this profound truth when it affirmed that the human person is precisely that being who can realize himself only by giving himself away. The Council Fathers wrote: "Man who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through the sincere gift of himself."<sup>3</sup> Likewise *Dei Verbum* reminded us that the whole point of Divine Revelation was to admit mankind once again into communion with the Triune God, to make us share in His intimate life and thus to allow us to enter into the society of love which is the Trinity (cf. n.2). Although this



sublime plan has been hampered by sin which broke every kind of relationship, yet it remains the great desire of the Father to reconcile us all in the unity of his own divine communion. For this purpose He sent His Son to restore all creation to full unity and so to reconcile everything in Himself by His cross (cf. Eph 1:10). And for what does Jesus pray in the Upper Room the night before his Passion and Death? “*That all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me*” (Jn 17:21). Ultimately, our encounter with the incarnate Christ restores the image of God in us to its full beauty and leads us to a life of Trinitarian communion. Although not fully attainable in this life, this most perfect Trinitarian unity is the exalted archetype and future perfection of all Common Life. St. Fulgentius of Ruspe tells us:

We are right to pray that this unity may be brought about in us through the gift of the one Spirit of the Father and the Son. The Holy Trinity, the one true God, is of its nature unity, equality and love, and by one divine activity sanctifies its adopted sons. That is why Scripture says that *God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit he has given us*.<sup>4</sup>

When we live well the common life we are witnessing to our belief in the Holy Trinity!

Some years ago a book was written by Thor Heyerdahl entitled *The Ra Expeditions*. In the book Thor recounts a dangerous sailing expedition he made from Africa to South America in a papyrus boat. Interestingly, it was not the ocean waves or the primitive vessel that worried him most, but the question of how the seven men aboard would get on with one another. They came from seven different countries and were of different ages, different professional skills, different native languages; they would be living shoulder to shoulder on a small boat for four months. There were many difficult moments, but all the men on board were genuinely committed to the expedition’s goals, and so their voyage ended successfully.

We have much in common with that expedition! In our monasteries we are very much in the same boat, fellow travelers in an enclosed structure that we may not easily leave. The voyage can be a joyful one or it can become a hell of loneliness and hurt, negativity, bickering and suspicion that ends in shipwreck for all. Yes, the quality of our Common Life in the monastery is of critical importance and so it remains for us to look again, as if for the first time, at the principles and goals of our life together.

## **II. The Sources of Dominican Common Life**

In surveying the sources of Common Life we find three layers of influence. The first and foremost is our own book of Constitutions, coupled with the Rule of St. Augustine. These two were preceded in time by the early monastic tradition, particularly those considered to be founders of the coenobitic life, Sts. Pachomius and Basil.

The primary source for our understanding Common Life, the Book of Constitutions is replete with references to this observance. Besides the texts directly related to Common Life it is significant to note how often the theme of communion emerges in connection with all the other elements of our life in a way that the earlier editions of our Constitutions did not make so explicit. In fact, before the 1932 Constitutions there had been virtually no *legislative* tradition on Common Life. One had to rely solely on the Rule of St. Augustine for guidance in this area. Yet, our present Constitutions have no less than 33 references to Common Life from beginning

to end! The regulations that Dominic drew up for both the Friars and the Nuns flowed out of their living together in community with a specific common mission to be accomplished for the building up of the Church. The vocation of both the Friars and the Nuns is the perfection of charity and the salvation of souls. Thus, our Constitutions are and will continue to be not simply a sterile codification of law but a dynamic expression of our life together in response to God's call to Dominican *communio* and *missio*.

The Constitutions of the Nuns, perhaps even more than those of the Friars, are impregnated with the spirituality of the Rule of St. Augustine. One cannot fully discuss these Constitutions then without first appreciating the richness of the Rule, read in the light of the life and works of the great Bishop of Hippo, who is frequently referred to as the Doctor of fraternal charity. "On what point must we bring our efforts to bear?" asks Augustine. "On fraternal love!"<sup>5</sup> Even from his early days Augustine saw that the fundamental law of monastic life should be that of Christian love founded especially on the example of the first Christians found in Acts 4:32-35, "The community of believers were of one heart and one mind. None of them ever claimed anything as his own; rather, everything was held in common." Augustine writes of his monastery:

Love is observed by everyone. Love is their guide as they eat, as they talk, in their conduct, in their demeanor. They are united in one love, and that love is the air they breath. What injures love is seen as an offense against God. What is hostile to love will be fought, will be rejected; what does harm to love must be suppressed that very day. For they will know that Christ and His Apostles teach that everything is vain if love alone is lacking, but that all is made perfect if love is present.<sup>6</sup>

Augustine was not entirely unique in establishing a monastic Common Life based on these sentences from Acts. Saint Pachomius and Saint Basil (4th century) also saw in the primitive Christian community a model for monastic living and one finds these sentences from Acts 4:32 in both the Coptic version of the *Life of St. Pachomius* and the *Longer and Shorter Rules* of St. Basil. Although Augustine clearly inherited much from his predecessors we can say that he applied it in a way distinctively his own. No other monastic Rule lays such stress on community life, to the degree that it has been consciously and forcefully made the central point of all monastic living. *Ante Omnia...* "Before all else, dear Sisters, love God and then your neighbor, because these are the chief commandments given to us."<sup>7</sup> In order to better understand the Augustinian ideal, let us look for a moment at the tradition that was handed on to him.

### **III. Common Life in Pachomian and Basilian Monasticism**

Common life existed in the period of the disciples of St. Antony the Great in embryonic form. It was entirely at the service of the personal search for God in solitude. We are best informed about the coenobia that developed in upper Egypt around St. Pachomius, because of the substantial body of Pachomian literature that has been preserved. The system of Pachomius represents the earliest systematic effort toward a common life and a stable monasticism. Two features of Pachomius's youth should be remembered: he had been a soldier and the charitable life led by a Christian community had converted him. As a result of these two factors, we find in his monasticism, both a taste for the common life and a desire for discipline, order and an almost military form of government. You will recall that Pachomius was in reaction to the eremitical life, which he considered dangerous and potentially illusory. He greatly emphasized the value of brotherhood, fraternal charity and mutual assistance, and

always referred to his institute as the *koinonia*. He warns: "Do not be at enmity with anyone, because he who is at enmity with his brother is an enemy of God, and he who is at peace with his brother is at peace with God. Have you not learned by now that nothing is preferable to peace, which makes each person at peace with his brother? Even if you are free of all sin, yet being your brother's enemy, you are a stranger to God."<sup>8</sup> All that the ancient hermits had been doing according to their individual inclinations, became *Rule* in a Pachomian monastery and was done as a matter of observance.

Pachomius became the model of the monastic system propagated by St. Basil who also broke with the eremitic ideal. Basil extensively quotes the Gospel in support of his objections to the solitary life. His pages on this subject in the seventh Long Rule are famous and might profitably be cited at some length.

Community life offers more blessings than can be fully and easily enumerated. It is more advantageous than the solitary life both for preserving the goods bestowed on us by God and for warding off the external attacks of the Enemy. Consider, further, that the Lord by reason of His excessive love for man was not content with merely teaching the Word, but, so as to transmit to us clearly and exactly the example of humility in the perfection of charity, girded Himself and washed the feet of the disciples. Whom, therefore, will you wash? To whom will you minister? In comparison with whom will you be the lowest, if you live alone? How, moreover, in solitude, will that good and pleasant thing be accomplished, the dwelling of brethren together in one habitation (Ps. 132.1) which the Holy Spirit likens to ointment emitting its fragrance from the head of the high priest? (Ps.132.2) So, it is an arena for combat, a good path of progress, continual discipline, and a practicing of the Lord's commandments, when brethren dwell together in community. This kind of life has as its aim the glory of God according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matt 5:16)<sup>9</sup>

This enthusiasm for the principle of Common Life rests upon Basil's conviction that a life of seclusion from one's fellow men offers no scope for the practice of humility and obedience and is opposed to the law of charity. Such features as the common house, the common table, prayer in common, all of which has become constant and permanent in Western monasticism were original with him in the sense that he regulated and systematized these elements. Perhaps it can be safely said that the establishment of true coenobitical monasticism, receptive of both sexes and all classes, was substantially the work of St. Basil.

#### **IV. The Augustinian Ideal of Common Life**

The author of our own Rule followed closely upon the heels of these two legislators but in his own unique way. Augustine's legislation is likely the earliest Western rule we possess and tends to present a new strain of the earlier tradition coming from the East. For Augustine, the Common Life is essentially a life of spiritual friendship based on the common search for God. It is a Common Life of a fraternal kind where there are friends and equals who agree on the goal to be pursued, on the means to be employed, on the lifestyle to be practiced, and one of them must give the others the fraternal service of assuming the direction of the community. The community itself is seen as the primary instrument of formation rather than the spiritual amma



and abba of the Eastern tradition. The superior is no longer called abbot, but prior or prioress who is "first among equals." This, of course, was the typical kind of life our Father St. Dominic proposed to his first brethren in establishing the Order.

Once again, it is Christian love which gives Augustine's theology of the monastic life its true flavor and we see his own personality reflected in it. Although a contemplative, he was clearly a gregarious person who needed other people. He always wanted to have his friends around him to help him toward spiritual growth. Yet, the monastery was never meant to be a place for casual relationships but for real commitment, a commitment in the last analysis, to be for others in the whole of their life's journey, in their search for wisdom, for values, for meaning. He was not suggesting a merely natural getting along with one another but a communion directly rooted in God. That is why Augustine insisted so often that the life of monks and nuns must be "toward God"; God is the central point; Christ the "soul" of the community whose relations are transformed by faith, hope, and sacrificial love. And he would have us cultivate not only the fulness of faith in community but also an abundance of mutual and religious respect. "In one another honor God", he says, " whose temples you have become."<sup>10</sup>

We all know well and through painful experience that this high and some would say almost impossible ideal cannot even begin to become a reality except through the grace of Christ. This love which we know to be "gift-love" is above all a gift! It is given first in baptism and then only through prayer, for Augustine tells us, "To the degree that charity is present in you, it is exercised by a holy life; to the degree that it is imperfect, it must be obtained in prayer."<sup>11</sup> Yet, Augustine also lays great emphasis on the necessity of personal dispossession, detachment, and voluntary poverty. In the Rule voluntary poverty constitutes the fundamental requirement of the Common Life. Whoever desires to possess God in this life, insofar as it is possible, must radically renounce everything which can be the object of personal appropriation after the example of Christ who though rich became poor for our sake. Augustine tells of his own beginnings in Sermon 355:

I began to assemble brothers to by my companions in the holy undertaking, men possessing nothing just as I possessed nothing and imitating me. Just as I sold my tiny bit of property and gave the proceeds to the poor, so they too who wished to be with me did the same, that we might live from our shared resources; but what we shared would be a great and very rich estate: God Himself.<sup>12</sup>

St. Augustine went further, insisting that this material poverty is only a beginning and must be practiced interiorly as well. In his view everything had not yet been achieved by a merely external renunciation. He once asked in a sermon, "What use is it to you if you stand there with empty hands, and yet with a heart full of greed."<sup>13</sup> In fact, we now need to ask why Pachomius, Basil and Augustine placed so much emphasis on community life? Is the reason not that they saw in the orientation to one's own ego, in cupidity and in individualism the principal obstacles to the realization of Gospel charity? The coenobitic monastic life is a program to blot out, to extinguish cupidity and selfishness in all its forms. This notion of dying to self is central to the Augustinian notion of achieving true charity in community. The point of departure then, is not concern for self, but a genuine concern for the interests of others. "For charity, as it is written, is not self-seeking, meaning that it places the common good before its own, not its own before the common good. So whenever you show greater concern for the common good than for your

own, you may know that you are growing in charity.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, all decision-making in Augustinian monasticism is measured by the abiding value of the common good. He says:

In the heavenly city God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28); there will be no individual enjoyment of one's own private possessions. Therefore, those who wish to share in that community (*societas*) are to accustom themselves now to preferring the common good to their own.<sup>15</sup>

Isn't this one of the most difficult concepts for our fallen human nature to grasp? Enclosed life can become almost a breeding ground for little turfdoms. Dr. Alec Whyte once explained that turf is “property.” It can be physical property or more importantly for us Dominicans it can be intellectual property. There is a very common thing today – the multiplication of lawsuits about “rights” to certain ideas. We may cling, with no sign of detachment, to our intellectual property which is often our sometimes poorly informed opinions on things. We vigorously protect these ideas because they have become a part of our own personality and to let go of them may even cause a little death. But real emptying of oneself has much more to do with what we hold on to most strongly and it's usually our opinions or perhaps a particular work we have been given to do for the monastery. Even opinions that seem to be noble – if we're squeezing them too tight – then their nobility is compromised. Dr. Whyte suggests the value of a personal inventory on our own “turf,” our own collections of things, to see which one could possibly be getting in the way of others living a better Common Life in our community.<sup>16</sup> In the end, I suppose we have only two choices. Will it be – heroic love or colossal compromise?

## V. The Dominican Specificity of Common Life

No founder, it seems, so whole-heartedly took on the Rule of Augustine and shaped a way of life and a system of government so thoroughly in the spirit and genius of Augustine's thought as did our Holy Father St. Dominic. His preference for this tradition of religious life is not difficult to understand. He was trained in it at Osma. He, like other medievals, would have spent much of his time studying the works of Augustine, which formed the basis of most libraries at that time.<sup>17</sup> If concord and unanimity had been essential in the Augustinian ideal it is no less so in the Dominican ideal. Father Vicaire presents the “fascination for unanimity” as a fundamental trait of St. Dominic. Perhaps this is why St. Dominic, at the very beginning of the Order, had placed in our profession a promise of common life. We read in LCM 17:1, “In the first days of the Order St. Dominic asked the brethren to promise him common life (fellowship) and obedience.” Father Vicaire concludes, “Among all the elements which promote unity, Dominic from the outset, made his choice and he chose the truth of faith. His concern and his strivings were for the unanimity of his Order. He was aware that the source of such unanimity was to be found primarily in the Holy Spirit, in charity certainly, but first of all in divine truth. For Dominic, this truth was first and foremost a person, the principle object of his contemplation, Christ the Redeemer.”<sup>18</sup>

Although no one was more community minded than Dominic, we might also call to mind that he would sometimes, when he walked, invite the brethren to go ahead so that he could be alone to pray. It is important to balance the place of community in our Dominican life by adding just a few words on solitude. In fact, one of the challenges that we must constantly face is the successful integration of Common Life with solitude. Heading the list of the elements in the formation of our novices, our Constitutions ask that they be instructed in “Common Life united

with silence and solitude." (LCM 118:II) In our Dominican vision of monastic life, solitude is a value which accompanies community. Why? Because without solitude there can be no authentic community life and vice versa. There can be risk of superficial living if the virtues are not also deepened and ripened in the climate of solitary prayer. Augustine serves as confirmation: "It is difficult to see Christ in the crowd; a certain solitude is necessary for our mind, it is in a certain isolation of the attention that we see God. The crowd is unruly; vision requires isolation."<sup>19</sup>

Turning now to the Constitutions of the Nuns it is important to note the context of the numbers dealing with Common Life. They are located in article one of the first chapter. This chapter forms part of the first section, The Imitation of Christ, which in turn is part of the first Distinction: The Life of the Sisters. So, in the context of the life and the consecration of the Nuns (ch. I), the Common Life is seen to occupy a principal position. And, even before speaking of the vows, which are typical of all religious life, our Dominican Constitutions speak of the Common Life and how we must be imbued with the community dimension. Fr. Damian Byrne, when Master of the Order, put it this way:

What we share in a special way is the fact of having an orientation to the community, and that our tradition is collegial. We must experience and realize this correctly, if we intend to be authentic Dominicans. This collegial and communitarian orientation and consensus must be the basis not only of our government, but also of our approach to practical problems such as formation, isolation, autonomy and enclosure.... [Also], the special role of the nuns in the preaching mission of the Order consists precisely in the community, which is the initial testimony to what is preached. Our testimony is the consequence primarily of our common life. The community is the place where the Word is born and lives.<sup>20</sup>

LCM 3 presents to us the principle elements that we are to live in unanimity. They are faith, contemplation, the liturgy (of praise and the Eucharist) and poverty. In paragraph two of this number we are shown how the manner of "living the vows" is strongly characterized by our life of fraternal communion. We are of one mind through obedience. Hence Fr. Vicaire notes, "Our obedience is not the obedience of an isolated woman who has made a private vow of obedience; it is primarily a necessity for community life. The same is true of our chastity practiced in a state of common life; our vow of chastity is the vow of women sustained by a loving community. In reflecting on the early Dominicans Vicaire says: Both as a safeguard and as a flowering, the common life gave to their chastity that lovable and radiating aspect which was so striking in St. Dominic. As for poverty, with all the more reason, it is the poverty of those living in community"<sup>21</sup>

If we were to ask the question of how the Common Life leads us to the goal of Dominican life, we could sum it up as follows: Dominican Common Life promotes the formation of virtue by the very regularity of our life, by the influence and good example of those around us, from the possibility of receiving necessary fraternal correction. It supports us in our desire for radical detachment from the world and through the common celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments nourishes us in the love of our Savior and the brethren. Our common sharing in the Holy Eucharist is the sign *par excellence* of our unity and the bond of our charity. Augustine proclaims:



Take, then, and eat the body of Christ, for by the body of Christ you are made members of Christ. Take also and drink the blood of Christ. Lest there be division among you, eat of that which binds you together. Lest you appear of little worth in your own eyes, drink of the great price that was paid for you.<sup>22</sup>

Common Life is also a supportive environment for prayer and study. Saint Albert the Great wrote of the pleasure of seeking the truth together: "*In dulcedine societas quaerens veritatem.*"<sup>23</sup> For us, study is essentially the entry into a community of people who seek the truth. Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, OP comments that:

Central to learning how to think is discovering how to live with other people, how to listen to them, how to learn from them. This is perhaps the hardest task of all... learning how to live with those who are different, who think differently... Central to any true study is that deep humility which exposes one to people who are not like one. How can I ever have a hope of understanding St. Augustine for instance, if I am locked in silence with a brother or sister because he or she has different views from me...<sup>24</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas, writes that solitude befits the contemplative who has already attained to perfection but that man is assisted in attaining this perfection by the fellowship of others in two ways.

First, as regards his intellect, to the effect of his being instructed in that which he has to contemplate; wherefore Jerome says: "It pleases me that you have the fellowship of holy men, and teach not yourself." Secondly, as regards the affections, seeing that our noisome affections are restrained by the example and reproof which we receive from others.... Hence a social life is necessary for the practice of perfection.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the orientation to communion and community has always been a basic principle in the Order. In the past few decades, however, it has been given increasing attention – urging us to a heightened awareness of how much more community means for us Dominicans than living in the same house and following a common schedule. Today probably more young people are drawn to religious life by the search for authentic community than for any other reason. But if community is what draws the young to religious life, it is most likely the difficulty of community living that makes so many give up. Father Timothy again sheds light on this situation:

We aspire to communion and yet it is so painful to live. When I meet young Dominicans in formation, I often ask what they find best and worst about religious life, and they usually give the same answer to both questions: living in community. That is because we are all the children of this age, moulded by its perception of the modern self... We enter religious life aspiring for community, longing to be truly brothers and sisters of each other, and yet we are products of modernity, marked by its individualism, its fear of commitment, its hunger for independence. Most of us are born into families with 1.5 children and it is hard to live with the crowd. And so the modern self and the religious life are alternative aspects of the same tension. The modern self dreams of an impossible autonomy, and we religious aspire to a community which is hard to sustain... There is the slow education in becoming human, in learning to speak and to

hear, to break the hold of self-absorption and egoism, which makes oneself the centre of the world.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the beginning of the 21st century will prove to be a certain “fulness of time” for a renewed understanding and commitment to Dominican Common Life. We in the post-modern age, despite the immense potential of science, technology and the communications explosion have arrived at a time of disenchantment about the possibility of any real fulfillment coming from these things. The euphoria over unlimited individual fulfillment has finally eroded and there seems to be, especially among the young, a profound disillusionment with the relentless press toward individualism. Hence, the time is ripe to hand on to those who come to us this beautiful legacy of Augustine and Dominic by the concrete example of our lives and not merely by the testimony of our documentation. Western society tells us of progress but seems to be leading toward poverty. It offers us freedom, and yet this often breeds nothing but powerlessness. It invites us to be the modern self, autonomous and alone, and yet we know that we cannot be fully human without going beyond ourselves in community. We, by the grace of God, can respond to the young in their hunger for true meaning by embodying the Augustinian-Dominican ideal in our lives. And when we do this out of love with that respect and that trust which comes from acknowledging the presence of God in one another, than difficulties notwithstanding, unity and harmony in our communities will flourish. And we will know that interior peace which God alone can grant to his children.

I can think of no more fitting way to conclude, than with another prayer of St. Augustine from the end of his treatise on *The Trinity*:

*You will be alone, O Triune God, to be all in all  
and eternally we shall all sing together but one praise, Yours,  
having become but one ourselves in your unity.  
It is then through fraternal charity, a charity that will continue eternally  
and in the measure of that fraternal charity,  
that we shall see God, and in a perfect manner. Amen.*

✂

## NOTES

1. St. Augustine, *Rule*, chap. 1, #3, from *The Book of Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers* (1987), p.11.
2. *Sermon 139*, 7.7
3. *Gaudium et Spes*, *The Documents of Vatican II*, Abbot-Gallagher ed. (New York: Guild Press 1966) #24.2
4. St. Fulgentius of Ruspe, in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. II, (New York: Catholic Book Publ. Co, 1976), p. 652.
5. *Homilies on the First Letter of John*, 5,7.
6. *The Ways of the Catholic Church*, 1.33.73, PL 32.
7. *Rule of St. Augustine*, chap. 1, #1, *ibid.*, p.11.
8. *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans. Armand Veilleux (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publ., 1981), vol. I.
9. Saint Basil the Great, *The Ascetical Works*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 9, p.250f.

10. *Rule*, chap. 1, #9, *ibid.*, p. 12.
11. *Sermon* 209.1.
12. *Sermon* 355.2
13. *Exposition on the Psalms*, Ps. 51.14.
14. St. Augustine, *Rule*, chap. 5, #31, *ibid.*, p.16.
15. *Exposition on the Psalms*, Ps. 105.34, alluding to Phil 2:21.
16. Alec J. Whyte, M.D., Conference given at the Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary, Summit, N.J., August 2000.
17. Cf. Fr. Gabriel O'Donnell, OP, *Freedom Through The Community*, at the 1989 General Assembly, publ. In *Dominican Monastic Search* 7-A (1989), p. 54ff.
18. Marie-H-Vicaire, OP, *The Genius of St. Dominic* (Nagpur, India: Dominican Publications, Seminary Hill, s.d.), p.23.
19. *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 17.11.
20. Letter to the Nuns (Rome, May 28, 1992), pp. 4-7.
21. *Ibid.*, p.101.
22. Philip T. Weller, STD, *Selected Easter Sermons of St. Augustine*, (St. Louis, MI: B. Herder Book Co., 1959), p.26.
23. *In Libr. viii Politicorum* C.G.
24. Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, OP, "Integral Formation," in *Sing a New Song* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1999), pp. 269.
25. *ST*, II-IIae, q. 188, art. 8.
26. "The Bear and the Nun," *ibid.*, pp. 224-227.



## STUDY IS A PRAYER TO TRUTH

### Jesus, pure Truth, teach us the Truth.

Sr. Mary of Jesus, O.P.  
Bronx, NY

#### I. Role of the observance in promoting the goal of our life.

At the beginning and the end of my talk, I will use a picture and a defining quotation from Scripture to ground my topic. *Wisdom has built herself a house* [Prov 9:1].

We tend to think of Gothic cathedrals in terms of **vertical lines**, **harmony** and **windows**. In Old Toulouse the *Eglise des Jacobins* dates to the mid-thirteenth century. It is Southern French in style rather than classically Gothic, but from the same time frame and it retains the basics along with its own eccentric adaptations: two naves with a single row of lofty pillars running down the center of its great length, and supporting a high vaulted roof (crown of vaulting is about 180 feet, the windows 50 feet high). The colors of this Dominican Church are described as creamy white columns against walls of mulberry brick-work.<sup>1</sup>

It is characteristic of the Gothic form that the ceiling, the vault and the roof appear to be leaping or springing to the sky supported by the piers and columns. The windows take the place of large portions of the walls. They let in light and shine out, they depict the *mirabilia Dei*. There is a dependent relationship among all the parts. This harmony is essential, since removing any component destroys the whole structure.

#### Can we make a comparison of our Dominican life to the Gothic cathedral?<sup>2</sup>

*To regular observance belong all the elements that constitute our Dominican life and order it through a common discipline. Outstanding among these elements are **common life**, the **celebration of the liturgy and private prayer**, the observance of the **vows** and the **study** of sacred truth* [LCM10:11].

Proverbs says, *Wisdom has built herself a house*. Dominic also built himself an edifice. The vertical lines draw us upward to God from whom we come. The level or horizontal lines reach out symbolically to each member in a community united with one mind and heart, with one common goal. Each of the basic elements builds up the edifice, like each member builds the community, into a unified whole.

*The purpose of all regular observance is that the word of God may dwell abundantly in the monastery* [96:11], **that all may dwell in charity with one mind and heart** [Rule of St. Augustine].

We are to be Women of the Word. We are called to listen, celebrate and keep that Word in our hearts; to clarify, illuminate and share.

We can think of the Gothic columns in terms of the four basic elements that make up our Dominican monastic life – all of these are important, but for this discussion, we will focus on the one column that represents STUDY.

In the cathedral, the vertical lines remind us of God who is the primary thrust of our study [LCM 101:] and the horizontal speaks of our Augustinian community of equals.

Study is the defining feature of our charism; it distinguishes us as Dominicans. We study to shape us more deeply into friends of God. "Study is not learning how to be clever but how to listen."<sup>3</sup> Learning is never an end in itself, but the means to deepening one's understanding of and love of God. We seek always to grow more deeply into the Truth which is God, through the Scriptures which reveal God. As Dominicans, we believe that we can be intimately changed by study. We believe that we can find credibility and certitude through an informed faith.

Study is an opening to TRUTH, the beginning of the wisdom foreseen in the Old Testament; it is not so much an information-path, as the way to the Other. Through our study, we, as Dominicans, are called to plunge ourselves into the Mystery that is the life of the Trinity.

In architecture, as in study, harmony is essential. Study does not exist in a vacuum but in the community. Excluding any of the elements of our life changes our study. Dominican study is a life-long endeavor. The Primitive Constitutions of the Friars tell us that "the first thing we should aim at in all our study is to fit ourselves to be of service to the souls of others" since "the special purpose for which the Order was founded is preaching and the salvation of souls" [Prologue]. Service for us as nuns, is firmly grounded in our contemplation and charity to all. Our study, I believe, should lead us deeper into prayer and contemplation, and into the reality of the communal life that is a preliminary step and foretaste of the Trinitarian union with the blessed.

From our very beginnings, Dominicans have revered learning and scholarship. Dominic himself led his small company of preaching friars to the school of Alexander Stavensby for the furtherance of their education. It was not just the six friars that studied, but Dominic as well.<sup>4</sup> Study is for all.

"The brethren should persevere in study and in doing so should recognize that they are constantly in one another's debt" [LCO 84]. This is a service of study and a communal exchange of ideas and ideals. Not merely for a word spoken is one in debt, but in **owing** the word of encouragement and hope that is needed. Our prayer and study will encourage us to speak the prophetic word: the word of challenge, of comfort, the word that is needed. Albert spoke of the pleasure of seeking the truth together in community ("*in dulcedine societatis quaerere veritatem*").<sup>5</sup>

In the medieval world few people were able to read so the windows of the cathedral became their Bible, their way to the wonders of salvation history. The windows told the story of God and also provided light for the worshiping community. We can see the fruits of our study of sacred truth, the result of our study in our knowledge and love of God, and our communion with our brothers and sisters in God through sharing that faith: *contemplata et aliis tradere*. At a meeting at Santa Sabina in March [2000], Sr. Mary Thomas of Oslo used the image of a tent or tipi to exemplify our presence – and that our preaching, our living, was the light shining forth when the flaps were pulled back. The tent was not dismantled, it was opened and the result was illuminating. Going back to my Cathedral image, as with a window, the Light of Christ shines out. I couldn't help thinking of the Gospel so often used for St. Dominic's feast, the lamp set on a stand where it gives light to all [Mt 5]. More of our study needs to be shared, it must "shine forth like shook foil" to use Hopkins's expression, for it to be truly an effective preaching

tool. Can we not say that our study must be prayerful, God-oriented and prophetic, that it reflect in a faithful way our age, and that it be not merely for personal edification but actually be a form of our preaching: for example, in conversation or *disputatio*?

In looking at the observance, we find that study is formative, a life-time enterprise, a form of asceticism, an aid to prayer, an aid to psychological growth, and a help in logical thinking which is important in our community and interpersonal relations. Our Constitutions clearly spell these out. One studies to achieve intellectual understanding, which in turn aids human maturity and balance. We are told it is a fruitful preparation for *lectio divina* [100:I]. It nourishes faith and helps us to contemplate the mystery of salvation [101]. "Christ, the fullness of revelation, has, by the gift of His Spirit made known the mystery of the will of the Father, through His Church and by His light enables human beings to scrutinize it [Heb 1:1-2 and Eph 1:9]. Study is simply that."<sup>6</sup>

Study does have an ascetical role; it is a discipline to persevere at one's study when a million things distract. A Dominican's "cross" has been seen both as one's desk or communal life. Study, the acquiring and sharing of truth, can also cause conflict or *disputatio* which should lead to a resolution [the God-like task of bringing order into chaos].

...the sisters must never forget that monastic theology is a theology of charity, constructed on the revelation of the God of Love and on the expression of the love of God that is the community. It is God – Charity that fashions us together in the image of God; from this it follows that a deepening of the heart must gradually take place. Study is then at the service of our common goal: to live in love at the service of the God of Love. It becomes a form of praise, of thanksgiving, a 'home-place' for our experience of God.<sup>7</sup>

On a practical note the Constitutions [102] turn to the actual provision for study. There must be scheduled lectures on appropriate material. *The work schedule of the nuns must always give priority to the Divine Office and prayer, as well as to the necessity for lectio divina and doctrinal study* [106:I]. Adequate time is to be allotted to the sisters during the week (no long stretches of inactivity in the area of study). Discussion periods allow for sharing of information and clarification of understanding and enhance the up-building of the community [LCM 102:I; ref to LCM 6:II]. Our libraries must be adequate. Even in the early days of the Order despite great poverty, our friars were supplied with funds for the necessary books.

*The directories should provide for a suitable course of study to cover the whole period of formation* [119:II]. Study helps to shape and mold us; our formative years in the Order are critical. They are like an apprenticeship, a formation to the Word of God. Richard Lischer,<sup>8</sup> in speaking of Martin Luther King, described him as being "apprenticed to the Word." That would not be a bad definition of formation in our tradition: attuned...waiting...studying...anxious to hear....listening to Jesus who is the gentle but persistent Truth.

Briefly I should mention the *Ratio Formationis* developed in 1993 by our novice mistresses to aid each other in the forming of new sisters to our Dominican life. This has provided guidelines and a tool for the formation program that is of assistance to the individual sisters, to the novice directress herself, and to the community in formulating the section on formation in the directories.



I believe that our tradition is a "broad and joyous" one in its view of the richness and diversity and individuality of each person and their capacity to make use of their intellectual gifts as a means of attaining to God.



## **II. Consideration of the observance in the light of our theological tradition.**

There seems to be in every Dominican a deep-seated desire, a passionate longing to know God and about God in a deeper way. From Thomas's earliest days, he asked people "What is God?" It's an old story passed down in the family. Isn't this our question, too? What is God, my relationship to him, my end? How is a Dominican's answer different from any other group's in the Church?

We are a rational, thinking Order, holistic, joyous, faith and hope-filled; people seeking a common ground in charity. We like to have things clarified and in their proper place. In our early history, one has only to look at the number of guides, penitentials, sermon outlines and commentaries. We like precision, exactitude, sometimes definitions and always, answers.

Can we not also look at our observance of study in terms of the great mysteries of our faith: the Trinity, Incarnation and Eucharist? Can we consider its centrality in the virtuous life as Thomas envisioned it in the *Summa*, in the preaching of the Order?

### **Trinitarian**

Our study, as is our life, is Trinitarian. This is our beginning and end; this is our life lived now through grace and later in glory. What is our goal, our *telos*, and how will we lay hold of it? Is it not our union with the Triune God? "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life" [CCC #1]. We are called to be conformed to the risen Christ and transformed through the grace of Resurrection: this means being caught up into very life of God,

...imitating Christ more perfectly and sharing his life more abundantly, to conversing with the Blessed Trinity dwelling in the sanctuary of the soul, cleaving to the Divine Persons by faith, hope and charity, and finally, to the embracing of everyone in the heart of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

The life of virtue, participation in the liturgy, the penetration of the Word through study, lectio and prayer; all these inform our lives. This leads to the gradual assimilation of and transformation into the *imago Dei*. All work together in the formation of the fully alive Christian and Dominican. We live out of, in and towards the great Trinitarian relationship; all our actions and desires need to be subordinated to this goal. Not only will our faith guide us, but also our ability to reason.

### **Incarnational**

Our Order grew out of a tradition where reason and faith went hand in hand. Dominic's own struggle against the Albigensian heresy, that dualistic approach which denied the goodness of God's own creation, was a demonstration of this unity. Because of the Incarnation, "the Word

became flesh" [Jn 1:14], sinful humanity was once again able to attain to beatitude by conformity to his image through grace: we could not earn our salvation, but we could cooperate in it.

Our study is an affirmation of this ability to find the good in created matter. We believe that we are capable of understanding, coming to some certainty through our God-given intellect. Study is a disciplined and rational approach to a question or problem with the possibility of coming to and living out the result. This is of course always premised by the Incarnate Son of God who is the Father's revelation and our paradigm.<sup>10</sup> Dominicans have a confidence in the possibility and value of study because they have a confidence in the gift and gifting of God. Having open ears to hear the question and eyes to see the living situation, our reason, coupled with faith, can aid us in attaining to a solution.

In our desire to be fast-knit to Christ Jesus, our study can be a struggle. "The attraction to God is a straining movement [Ph 3:13]. The nun's vocation is to savor the Word, to be wholly drawn towards the Lord, towards the Word of the Father"<sup>11</sup> (this through study, lectio and prayer).

### **Eucharistic**

The *Berakah* prayers of the Jewish tradition are blessing prayers that praise God for all his works; in addition to thanksgiving, there are often prayers of supplication and contrition. Our Eucharistic prayers came out of this tradition. They basically combine elements of praise or blessing with thanksgiving. One of the mottos of the Order is "to praise, to bless, and to preach." This sense of 'blessing' for Dominicans has always included praise, thankfulness and joy: because everything about God and from him is good.

Fr. Timothy has described study as a eucharistic act; it is a recognition of mind and rationality as the gift of God, the use of which 'rejoices' God. "We open our hands to receive the gifts of tradition rich with knowledge."<sup>12</sup> Study implicitly acknowledges the capacity to grapple with and grasp a text, a question or a situation. It confronts the wave of fundamentalism sweeping the globe that says we must accept without understanding. Finally, study proclaims the accessibility of Truth over and against the mainstream mistrust of any basic certitude.

### **Thomas's treatment of Study as virtue**

For Thomas, study is the keen application of the mind to something; studiousness is properly about knowledge and truth. It should be transformative, bringing one into *caritas*, a deeper relationship with God, our brothers and sisters. Basil Cole, in an excellent article on the spirituality of study, emphasizes the need to integrate study with prayer in the virtuous life.<sup>13</sup> Study becomes faith seeking understanding. Faith builds upon and perfects reason [ST, I, 1, 8 ad 2].<sup>14</sup>

There can be a misuse of study, called by Thomas *curiositas* [ST, II-II, 167, 1 & 2] which manifests itself as an inordinate absorption in unnecessary pursuits or a pride in one's accomplishments, which could in our case lead to an avoidance of prayer or community life. He cites Augustine, "in the study of creatures we must not exercise an empty and futile curiosity, but should make them the stepping-stone to things unperishable and everlasting" [ST, II-II, 180, 4].

Thomas's account of *studiositas* or studiousness is placed under the cardinal virtue of temperance since it is to be regulated by reason. Studiousness [ST, II-II, 166, 1 & 2] must be subjugated to our goal, fueled by holy desire, to grasp more deeply the truths of the faith that

this understanding may in turn be nourishment for ourselves as well as others. John Courtney Murray gave the following description of a theologian that, I believe, especially fits a Dominican:

The way of man to the knowledge of God is to follow all of the scattered scintillae that the Logos has strewn throughout history and across the face of the heavens and the earth until they all fuse in the darkness that is the unapproachable Light. Along this way of affirmation and negation all the resources of language, as of thought, must be exploited until they are exhausted. Only then may man confess his ignorance and have recourse to silence. But this ignorance is knowledge, as this silence is itself a language – the language of adoration.<sup>15</sup>

## Preaching

Briefly I would like to mention a word about Preaching in terms of study. The Fundamental Constitution of the Order refer to all the members as *sharers of the apostolic mission, the life of the Apostles in the form conceived by St. Dominic* [IV].

The nuns of the Order had their beginnings at the monastery of Blessed Mary of Prouille. We are told that Father Dominic associated women with his "holy preaching" by their prayer and penance, [FCM 1:I] and indeed they formed the Holy Preaching of Prouille. Women of the Word, our preaching consists in seeking, pondering and calling upon him in solitude so that the word proceeding from the mouth of God may not return to him empty, but may accomplish those things for which it was sent [FCM 1:II].

Both the friars and the nuns share a common spirituality in the basic elements of Dominican life, and they are continually transformed through these very foundations: common life, vows, celebration of the liturgy and study. In his letter on study, Fr. Timothy recounts how Simone Weil wrote to Fr. Perrin that desire must be the basis of study: "the intelligence can only be led by desire."<sup>16</sup> Study carries a person out of himself toward the object of his dreams.

"First the bow is bent in study, then the arrow is released in preaching" [*Arcus teditur in studio, postea sagittatur in praedicatione*]. The "bow bent in study [the mind inclined to God in study and contemplation]...gives power to and determines the trajectory of the arrow of preaching...be it sounded from the pulpit, or as it appears on the frescoed walls of a mendicant church,"<sup>17</sup> or... as prayed in a cloistered garden.



## III. An historical account of some of the ways that the living of the observance of STUDY has developed or changed .

Our holy Father **drew up a rule to be followed** and constantly showed a father's love and care for these nuns and for others established later in the same way of life. In fact, "they had no other master to instruct them about the Order." Finally, he entrusted them as part of the same Order to the fraternal concern of his sons. [ FCM 1:I].

Our Constitutions and tradition presuppose Dominic gave a way of life with a rule [c. 1206]. There is a lack of information regarding the earliest Prouille constitutions – whether there



were indeed anything resembling Constitutions this early. First came the living and experimentation, then the codifying followed. After the friars were established in 1216, Dominic probably planned to harmonize the Prouille rule making them both more compatible. When he was establishing the nuns at San Sisto in Rome, he brought sisters from Prouille who would train the newly formed group, some of whom would also take back to Prouille the new legislation. The earliest extant constitutions are those of San Sisto. As we look at the early expansion of the nuns (the proliferation of monasteries and groups seeking to be affiliated to the Order), we find that they were trying to adapt the Friars' Constitutions as meaningful and providing identity and stability. Hinnebusch speaks of this as indicative of the early period.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1226 San Sisto Constitutions (Vatican Archives) we find:

*So with the exception of the hours which the Sisters ought to consecrate to prayer, to reading, to the preparation of the Office and chant, or **to study**, they should devote themselves to some manual labor as shall be judged good by the Prioress.*<sup>19</sup>

Sr. Marie-Ancilla makes the note that *eruditio litterarum* referred to the "Scriptures" in Augustine's writings, suggesting that the study of Scripture had its place in San Sisto.<sup>20</sup>

By Humbert's edition of the Nuns' Constitutions [1259], mention of study is lost. We can presume its continuance, but must look to the evidence of schools, scriptoria, libraries, lectures, talks, mention of writings, safeguarded in archives or in annals (certainly there are Elsbeth Stagel's notes for Henry Suso's biography and spiritual biographies of many of the nuns).<sup>21</sup> Attempts to harmonize the constitutions of the nuns (this would include the section on Study) with that of Friars' up until 1259 and again in 1971 were based on a desire for uniformity within the Order, and later the Vatican II mandate of *Perfectae Caritatis* to return to the sources.

St. Raymond's and Humbert of Romans' adaptations of the nun's rule/constitutions was to conform it to the canon law of the day, as well as bring them into some conformity with the Constitutions of the Friars. Unfortunately, the section on study in the Constitutions was lost from 1259 until the 1971 Interim Constitutions. Perhaps it is time to once again look to the Constitutions of our brothers for LCM, as in the beginning.

Benedict Ashley,<sup>22</sup> in his book *The Dominicans*, has a fascinating chapter on what he calls the "Age of Compromise (1800's)" a century in which the Order very nearly died out. A strong anti-intellectual trend prevailed throughout the Order, so much so that John Henry Newman upon becoming a Catholic was told that the Dominicans were a "a noble ideal, now dead." This anti-intellectual tendency was inadvertently absorbed by the nuns.

Religious life in France was severely compromised by the French Revolution. Nuns and priests were murdered or exiled; schools, hospitals and monasteries were destroyed or commandeered by the government. Religious went into hiding, expecting to return when the worst of the terror was ended. Eventually small groups of nuns and priests did come back; some tried to return to their former residences. Often, these had been ruined. It was a time of great discouragement and grief, but also one of new beginnings.

To Père Henri Lacordaire we owe the restoration of the Order in France. For him, the re-evangelization of France was the ideal field of enterprise for the restored Order of Preachers. But his view of restoration differed at times with other members of the Order. Lacordaire saw

the restoration as a renewal and re-creation, not simply a return to the past, to the pre-French Revolution life-style or an idealized view of the Middle Ages with all its laws and practices. Almost immediately, an intense reformist reaction was undertaken by his recruit, Pere Vincent Jandel, Vicar General from 1850, Master General from 1855-1872, who strongly favored Romantic Catholicism, a prevalent view of the day which looked back to the Middle Ages as the Age of Faith. He endorsed a very literal view of law and observances.<sup>23</sup> Jandel's inclination to strict monastic observance was taken up by the French monasteries. Because of the problems of poverty in the monasteries (intensified by the Franco-Prussian War, the increase of foundations, sheer existence, and later World War I), there was a great emphasis on work rather than on study – more in keeping with monasticism in the Benedictine mode than with our Dominican tradition.

Within the reformed and reestablished Dominican women religious, there seems to have been an added ideological split. The first group emphasized our Augustinian roots with its strong view of community; many of these evolved into active, teaching and nursing groups, some of which became missionaries. The second approach stressed the observances of the life through asceticism (even to the detriment of its Augustinian sense of community) while attempting to return to what was seen as its “pure” monastic ideal.<sup>24</sup>

All the American monasteries are founded directly or indirectly from these French houses where the nuns had struggled to keep the Dominican charism alive despite exile, suffering and severe poverty. Their heritage is indeed a noble one, but as is clear from this brief presentation, the relentless demands of survival left little time for anything but prayer and hard manual labor. Study passed out of the picture as a basic element of the life.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a certain homogenization of religious or monastic life took place, an overall monastic leveling which was further solidified in the 1917 Code of Canon Law and subsequent documents which tended to overlook traditional differences. Much of the uniqueness of the individual Orders was down-played or lost, including the importance of study for the nuns in our tradition.

Although the 1930 Constitutions still make no mention of study for the nuns, Master General Gillet, in his letter of introduction, speaks of the young women entering who “bring certain dispositions of mind unknown to their elders,” who have “a desire to know and understand religious questions.” As a basis for prayer and as an efficacious means of sanctification, he speaks to the need for doctrinal teaching. The *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* guidelines [27-1-30], recommending instruction in Christian doctrine for all novices prior to profession, are appended to the Book of Constitutions: it was not sufficient only to memorize, the sisters must be able to explain their faith.

In the pre-Vatican II days, study could entail memorization of portions of the Gospels and explanations of what they meant with recourse to the Fathers; and also the doctrine or catechism which was required to pass the Council evaluation for Profession. Spiritual reading was of varied quality as libraries were poor with limited access; Dominican or diocesan fathers did give talks, based very much on the seminary courses they would be teaching. Theological instruction could and did include lectures on prayer, the indwelling Trinity, the virtuous life, but the theologians were not everywhere and at all times available. Input was dependent on availability.

## **Some examples of changes since Vatican II**

The Dominican nun is a student of the heart of God; she is involved with, and in converse with God. Study should be clearly adapted to the end of the contemplative life; to what is conducive for spiritual growth. While the Scripture and the sacraments are formative, the Dominican also draws nourishment from the Fathers along with the great teachers and doctors of the faith, especially our brother Thomas who takes the pre-eminent position [LCM 101:II & III].

In the formation of each sister, the intellectual capacity is critical and must be taken into account. Study demands grounding in the life along with instruction that will aid and not hinder the one seeking God. The Sister must be formed "to bring the intellect down into the heart,"<sup>25</sup> to make it real for the individual.

In the formation section of the interim Constitutions, the directress was exhorted to "explain the Constitutions so that they may know and conform to the design of St. Dominic and the traditions of the Order" [125. S II, 1971 *Constitutions*]. There is now no mention of the privileged place of either the *Rule* or the Constitutions. This is unfortunate.

In addition to the private study always advocated for the sisters, there is today a greater variety of educational models available than in the past in the line of home-study courses; university/seminary courses via Internet; correspondence courses; private tutoring. This is certainly helpful as not all communities have individuals prepared to teach or resident chaplains. Sisters entering are more familiar with the use of self-study materials, Internet chat rooms and audio/visual tools; some indeed come from a background of home schooling rather than the traditional classroom setting.

## **Collaboration in terms of greater community growth/interactions; joint efforts.**

Our Theological Formation Program for our young sisters offers not only a solid base of philosophy and theology but provides a model for the integration of study with our lifestyle that continues to benefit both the individual and the community after its completion. This has now been in place through three sessions and has certainly been an aid to all participants. These study efforts have resulted in specific communication skills: critical analysis and examining material for clarity of thought, leading to improved community discussion and interpersonal relationships.

Common study ventures, either within the house or among communities, are a fruitful way of improving the quality of our Dominican life. One has only to think of the joint undertaking of the Conference members writing the book *One Mind and Heart in God*, or on an individual community level, the booklet on prayer "Three Dominican Saints at Prayer" compiled and printed by the Monastery of Our Lady of Grace as a recent community study project.

Another venture that has proven very effective has been the work done over the past ten years by the novice mistresses of the various houses. By coming together during the summers they have developed a common initial formation program complete with course outlines, readings and suggestions, that can be utilized by the experienced or newly appointed directress. The formation efforts went further in the formulation of the 1993 *Ratio Formationis* and its dissemination to all the houses of the Conference.

These are important changes!





#### IV. What are some challenges or questions to the Assembly regarding the present practice of Study and possible trends in the future?

Now we come to the fourth section of this paper. We need to look with Baalam's eyes, those far-seeing eyes of a man who could see what God sees [Nb. 23].

##### 1] Interaction with the text

The whole monastic tradition has espoused lectio and study as a fruitful preparation for prayer. What about our cultural conditioning as Americans, as citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What about our culture where busy-ness and productivity are so highly valued (given our driven and consumerist society)? How do these cultural shifts/changes influence incoming candidates? Do they see the value of study without tangible results, grades, degrees, increased pay? Without instant gratification as can supposedly be obtained from a global information system worldwide network or any tangible "reward," will candidates be able to grasp the concept of **sitting with the text; mulling over it?**

For many Americans, the continuous viewing of television and videos is shifting the outlook from a reading society into a visually-oriented society. At one time, literature students avoided reading classics by substitution of Cliff notes or comic-book versions (exchanging one piece of the written word for another). Now the medium has changed: the movie, video or even audio version is sought. It has become a contest between reading and visualization. Birkerts refers to this as the **"loss of the active reader with a printed text meeting the 'other.'"**<sup>26</sup> Herein is a great loss. Isn't this what we seek in our study; to come in contact with "The OTHER"?

##### 2] Attack on Truth

A theme repeatedly underscored by Fr. Timothy in his letters to the Order is the cultural attack on Truth<sup>27</sup> or the crisis of Truth:

– This can be seen as an inability to accept, recognize or acknowledge the possibility of objective Truth. There is a lack of credibility: one does not assume answers are possible.

– This crisis is also present in the fundamentalism where there is pure acceptance without utilizing/engaging the mind. This poses a denial of the rational powers or the possibility that one can come to any kind of understanding that is not imposed.

Given our Dominican motto, "*Veritas*," both of these attitudes are vastly un-Dominican, even anti-Dominican; a denial of the Incarnation – the taking of flesh by the God-man and its divinization through his redemption. God created man, body and soul, with a rational intellect to be used, not to shrink away like some vestigial organ. The Incarnation demands the active engagement of all the God-given faculties. What are the attitudes of people coming to the Order? Does their culture or tradition help or hinder? Will study prove to be an aid or a hindrance given their background? Will this not be one of the challenges of our age? How do they grasp Truth?

### 3] Communities of Hope/Trivialization of words

I have found myself reading a lot about computers over the past months. It may be consoling to you that the displacement of the page by the screen is not yet total, although there are many problems apparent as we pass "from the Codex page to the Homepage"<sup>28</sup>: language erosion and impoverishment, use of hypertext, flattening of history and computer jargon or plainspeak to mention a few. Words and information are very available on the Internet: no copyrights, no censors, plagiarized materials and programs, no need to acknowledge sources. I saw one book advertized: if purchased you received the address of a web-site where you could download the footnotes: they weren't even printed for the publication price.

Words are no longer sacred; meaning is lost. If/as we become proficient with new tools, computers, laptops, do we gain or lose? With the computer, we write faster; it is easier to correct errors; we benefit from spelling and grammar checks; we can put down a word, change it according to a thesaurus at an appalling speed – the blinking cursor moves us along sometimes to the rhythm of the William Tell Overture.

Our experience is that we study through our reading, writing, thinking, living with the text. This has been the tradition since the written word replaced the oral transmission. Fr. Timothy suggests that we build up community as we struggle together to open up the mysteries of the Word of God. Many of us have experienced the joy of seeking the truth together that St. Albert praised.

Augustine's communities were places of silence and reflection with a great love for the printed word, but they were also places of lively discussion and *disputatio*. We impact upon each other; we go to God together as a community. "To study is to enter into a conversation, with one's brothers and sisters and with other human beings in our search for the truth that will set us free"<sup>29</sup> The communal reading and struggle with the text, the *disputatio*, the chapter are means of intensifying the bonds of community. Traditionally the monastic spirituality we inherited from Augustine has been such that the input of one builds on the other. We must become more expert at listening to and hearing the other.

Study is then at the service of our common goal: to live in love at the service of the God of Love. It becomes a form of praise, of thanksgiving, a 'home-place' for our experience of God.<sup>30</sup>

A few years ago Dr. Haille Moore spoke at the prioresses' meeting about monasteries in the Middle Ages as centers of culture and learning. Clearly they responded to the needs of the people of their day. Are today's communities responding in a similar vein? We have all encountered people hungering for God, longing to find a place of quiet to experience prayer. Does our study and reflection sensitize us to the spiritual crises of our world? If we say that our study is incarnational, does it not mean that our lives must also be incarnational? We have said that to study is to enter into a conversation, to dialogue; our study must aid us to share the tension of our brothers and sisters in our common search for the truth that will set us free. We are inserted into the lives of those who inhabit our time and place, and our study should therefore call us to witness God's loving mercy for them.

### 4] Words of Hope/Prophetic Words

Hasn't our Master General challenged us to preach more – certainly by our prayer, but why not by writing, sharing ideas within the community and maybe beyond? A recent book by

Kallistos Ware bemoans the fact that there are many words, but few words of power uttered in the world today:

In an age when language has been shamefully trivialized, it is vital to rediscover the power of the word, and this means rediscovering the nature of silence, not just as a pause in the midst of our talk, but as one of the primary realities of existence. ...Yet, for a word to possess power, it is necessary that there should be not only one who speaks with the genuine authority of personal experience, but also one who listens with attention and eagerness.<sup>31</sup> (Do you hear the echo of the Fundamental Constitution, V: "...with ardent faith and deep hunger"?)

Is this true – is there a readiness to listen WITH ATTENTION and to hear? An ability to distinguish and determine? We need to become women fine-tuned to God's message. Can we be *Baalams* in a world that is inundated with words, but needs the Word? If we are women of the Word, if we are open to hear it and let it speak through us, the Word's in-breaking should be evident to us and to our hearers.

We learn to study to belong to each other and so to hope. To study is an act of hope. "When we gather together to study, our community is a 'holy preaching.'"<sup>32</sup> Does our study give us words that bring hope and encouragement; are our words prophetic and pregnant with the Spirit's promise?

#### **Pictures:**

I began this presentation with the Cathedral; I will end it with a waterfall. This is Elk Falls on Vancouver Island in British Columbia.<sup>33</sup>

It may seem strange that I should choose this picture, but when I saw it, I had just been reading St. Thomas's inaugural lecture as a Master of Theology. To refresh your memories, he commented on the text from Psalm 103:3.

*Watering the earth from his things above,  
the earth will be filled from the fruit of your works.*

Rain pours down from the clouds, and watered by the rain, the mountains produce rivers, and by having its fill of these, the earth becomes fertile. Thomas comments on the communication of spiritual wisdom (another term for theological study) from this text, from the point of view of the teaching, the teachers, the students and the means of communication.

In humility, "like good soil receiving the grain" [Lk 8:15], students must **listen** to teaching: "If you bend your ear, you will receive teaching" [Ecc 6:34]. **Right judgement** is needed to assess what they hear: "Does not the ear assess words?" [Jb 12:11] and they need fertility, in the sense of **capacity to discover things**. "Give a wise man the opportunity and he will obtain more wisdom" [Prov 9:9].<sup>34</sup>

The Gothic Church in Toulouse is the past and present of the Order, and Elk Falls, B.C., represents the present and future; we speak of one of the earliest sites of Dominican endeavor and one of the newest. Toulouse is beautiful, medieval, solidly built by men to honor God, close to the Order's foundation, to Dominic himself. My waterfall is also beautiful, more raw, the product of centuries of glacial activity, close to our most recent foundation of Surrey; a piece of



nature that glorifies God and rejoices the viewer. Toulouse is a sign of fidelity and forbearance; the waterfall is a sign of vitality and hope.

Study is something like this. In his lecture, Thomas tells us that to study well, we need docility, good judgment and fertility; the Master General, in his letter on study, says we need attentiveness, fruitfulness or fertility, hope and joy.<sup>35</sup> The waterfall is a wonderful image.

There is one other thing in the picture of Elk Falls: the mist and fog rising above the river. Earlier I suggested that we need to see with Baalam's vision. He has some wonderful lines in the Book of Numbers. He announces himself as "the man whose eye is true...who hears what God says, and knows what God knows... who sees what the Almighty sees, enraptured, and with eyes unveiled." Wouldn't he have been a marvelous Dominican?

Our study needs a prophetic element: it must enable us to dream dreams and experience visions all the while living in the present moment, alert to its possibilities. The raw power is present; like the waterfalls, it needs harnessing. Our future may not be clear; it requires our study and effort; it reminds us that the Spirit works as he chooses.

At the First General Assembly in 1984, in speaking of study and lectio, Sister Mary Magdalen said,

"...we should see in them our contribution to opening up the supply-source from which the Holy Spirit, the Living Fountain" can water the whole of our life; even as he, the 'Breath of God', becomes with the Word of God the atmosphere we breathe, in which we dwell."<sup>36</sup>

### Concluding prayer

As I conclude it is most appropriate to make reference to Mary, Mother of our Savior, who listened and pondered, who could be said to have studied the wonders of God. Some of the early monks called her the "table at which faith sits in thought."

May Mary, Seat of Wisdom, be a sure haven  
for all of us who devote our lives to the search for wisdom.  
May our journey into wisdom, sure and final goal of all true knowing,  
be freed of every hindrance by the intercession of the one who,  
in giving birth to the Truth and treasuring it in her heart,  
has shared it forever with all the world. [*Fides et Ratio*, # 108]

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### NOTES

1. Ed. note: Here Sister displayed a photo of the interior of this Church, which space prevents us from reproducing.
2. This comparison of Dominican life and the Gothic cathedral was suggested by the comparison of Thomas' teaching and the Cathedral which appeared in the video, "St. Thomas Aquinas: Entering the Cathedral of Wisdom," Series on Dominican Perspectives by Sr. Ruth Caspar, OP (St. Mary of the Springs Dominican, Barry University).

3. Timothy Radcliffe, OP, "Wellspring of Hope: Study and the Annunciation of the Good News," *Sing a New Song: the Christian Vocation* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1999), 56.
4. M-H Vicaire, OP, *St. Dominic and His Times* (Green Bay, WI: Alt Publishing Company, 1964), p. 178.
5. Radcliffe, cited p. 70.
6. Sr. Marie-Ancilla, OP, *Commentaire du Livre des Constitutions des Moniales de l'Ordre des Precheurs*, (1992), 131. This excellent commentary is currently available in French and Italian. Sr. Mary Thomas, OP, of our Buffalo monastery has been translating it for publication in *DMS*; she provided me with the pertinent section in French, and I was very graciously aided with the translation by Sr. Margaret Phelan, RSCJ.
7. Fr. Jean Rene Bouchet, OP, cited in Sr. Marie-Ancilla, OP, *Commentaire*, 130.
8. Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (Oxford, 1995).
9. Letter of Br. Anicetus Fernandez, O.P. (22/7/71), Book of Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers, 4.
10. Liam Walsh, OP, "Dominican Study and the Experience of God," *Dominican Monastic Search* (November, 1984): 53-54.
11. Sr. Marie-Ancilla, OP, "Dominican Nuns and Mystery – Theology of Dominican Monastic Life According to LCM" (Proceedings of Colloquium at Herne 6-9 May, 1997), 29.
12. Radcliffe, 60.
13. Basil Cole, OP, "Is there a spirituality of study?" *Homiletic & Pastoral Review* (March, 2000): 23-30.
14. Other helpful references to Study include:  
     *Quodlibetal Question* I, a.14, pp. 613-17; *Contra Impugnantes Dei Cultum et Religionem*, chap.11, pp. 606-612; translated with notes in Simon Tugwell OP, ed., *Albert and Thomas* (New York-Mahwah: Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, 1988).  
     Letter to Brother John attributed to Aquinas (*De Modo Studendi*). It is translated by Victor White, OP, in *Life of the Spirit* (Oxford: Blackfriars, December 1944), Suppl. 161-80.  
     A.D. Sertillanges, OP, *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959).
15. This is a quotation about Martin Buber, and was used by application to Thomas Aquinas in a homily at Corpus Christi by Fr. Donald Moore, SJ, Head of Fordham Theology Department, 1/28/98.
16. Radcliffe, 59.
17. M. Michele Mulchahey, "First the Bow is Bent in Study..." *Dominican Education before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), ix.
18. William A. Hinnebusch, OP, *The History of the Dominican Order*, Vol. 1 (New York: Alba House, 1973), 380-82.
19. This reference is cited in LCM 103:III.
20. Sr. Marie-Ancilla, OP, *Commentaire*, (1992), 130.
21. Hinnebusch, *History*, 382-7.
22. Benedict Ashley OP, *The Dominicans* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 190-211.
23. Lacordaire's reestablishment of the Order is well-documented by Peter M. Batts, OP, *Lacordaire's Understanding of "Restoration" in Relation to His Refounding of the Dominican Order in 19<sup>th</sup> Century France* (Dissertation, Ottawa, Canada: St. Paul University, 1999).

24. Sr. Barbara Estelle, "Values and Symbols: The Restoration of Dominican Monasteries in the Religious Climate in France in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" (Proceedings of Colloquium at Herne 6-9 May 1997), 15-23.
25. Sr. M-Ancilla, *Commentaire*, 151.
26. Sven Birkerts, *Gutenberg Elegies: Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1994), 3.
27. A recent modern author suggests that even with the greatest doubts, "the hermeneutics of suspicion," deconstruction and a critique of organized religion are all "unwittingly based on the absolute transcendent principle of the desire for truth." David Walsh, *Guarded by Mystery: Meaning in a Post Modern Age* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), pp 33-36.
28. James J. O'Donnell, *Avatars of the Word: From Papyrus to Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 50.
29. Radcliffe, 70.
30. Sr. Marie-Ancilla, *Commentaire*, 130.
31. Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*, Volume I – Collected Works (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 135-6.
32. Radcliffe, 61.
33. Ed. note: Space prevents us from including this picture.
34. Thomas Aquinas, "Inaugural Lecture" (1256), pp.355-360; Simon Tugwell OP, ed., *Albert and Thomas* (New York-Mahwah: Paulist Press Classics of Western Spirituality, 1988).
35. Radcliffe, 55-6.
36. Sr. Mary Magdalen, OP (Newark), "The Value and Practice of Lectio," *Dominican Monastic Search*, (November, 1984): 61.









*Coronation of the Virgin*  
Fra Angelico



## Praying With A Picture: Coronation of the Virgin

Sr. Mary of the Trinity, O.P.  
Farmington Hills, MI

In the last issue of *Monastic Search* the editor invited nuns who may have been sparked by earlier articles on "Praying with a Picture" to share their reflections. A print of *The Coronation of the Virgin* by Fra Angelico hangs in our refectory and for several years I have sat in a place where my gaze rested easily upon it. However the real reason I chose this fresco to pray with was because this is the mystery of the Rosary that I have always found hard to understand. What does it really mean that Mary is crowned queen of heaven? My hope was that staying with the image might open the mystery to me in a new way. I was not disappointed. And so I share with you my reflections in ten days of living, with this fresco, in the mystery of the Coronation of the Virgin.

### Reflections on Fra Angelico's San Marco fresco of the Coronation of the Virgin

#### *Day One*

As I began to gaze at the fresco, I noticed first the marked difference in style between the figures of Christ and Mary and those of the saints below. Christ and the Virgin Mary seem bathed in an unearthly light. Their garments seem to be woven of the clouds on which they are seated. The figures at the top of the fresco draw one into the mystery of the Crowning of Mary.

The figures below, identified as (from left) Thomas, Benedict, Dominic, Francis, Peter Martyr, and Mark, are painted in more earthly colors. Yet the very position of their bodies, kneeling with hands held in the Orant gesture, draws them into the mystery. What strikes me as unique about this fresco is that Fra Angelico painted these six saints **not** as facing the mystery above but as turned toward the viewers. Their eyes are the unearthly part of their appearance as they look intently inward into the mystery – perhaps to tell us that we too are called to look inward and contemplate the mystery not with earthly eyes but with our spiritual eye.

#### *Day Two*

The apex of this fresco is perhaps the crown held by Christ's hands, suspended just above the Virgin's head. It is as if we have been invited to step into the mystery of the eternal honoring of Mary. If the crown were actually placed on Mary's head, the act of honoring would in a way be finished, but Angelico's portrayal catches us up into the eternal Now – the *hodie* of the liturgy. Today – Now: Mary is being crowned. The figures below also seem caught up into the "Now" of the mystery of the Crowning of the Virgin by the contemplative gaze of their eyes.



### *Day Three*

Today I noticed that the mystery of the Coronation of the Virgin forms a heavenly mandala within the fresco, that is, a sacred circle which invites contemplation and at the same time expresses the contemplative insight of the artist. The outer portion of the mandala is painted in an ethereal green, the color of hope. This mystery honors the one we call upon each evening at the hour of Compline as "our life, our sweetness and our hope." "Our hope" – because just as in Mary's Assumption we preview our own ascension, the Coronation is a preview, an invitation to contemplate, the glory we hope to share one day.

### *Day Four*

Today I find myself drawn into the circle of white light between Mary and Christ. One commentator asks: Is it the Father? It seems to me that the whole mandala encircled in the ethereal green light is the Father, the source from which this mystery and all mystery springs. What then of the white light? One might think of it as the Holy Spirit emanating from Christ and entering the Virgin Mary in the Eternal Now, the Ancient Day of heaven. If the white light is the Spirit this draws the whole Trinity into the mystery of the Coronation. Christ crowns Mary his Mother eternally in the Father, to the joy of the Holy Spirit.

### *Day Five*

What strikes me today in this beautiful fresco is the posture and gestures of Mary and Christ. Christ is seated, straight, tall, regal in appearance. His hands reach out in a gesture of loving bestowal or giving. Mary's whole body leans into a humble acceptance of the crown, the honor of her Son and God. She is seated on the clouds with her Son, seated in the presence of the Trinity. In the mysterious co-mingling of God's gracious gift and her total "yes" she has become "God for God" – yet aware of the participation of her humanity in the Divine Son to receive the crown of glory.

### *Day Six*

What seems so expressive in today's viewing is the hands of each figure. Christ's hands reach out decisively yet tenderly to place the crown on his mother. Mary's hands, crossed over her breast in a gesture of awe and adoration, draw her into acceptance of the honor her Son wishes to bestow on her. The hands of the figures below seem raised pointing towards heaven in prayerful adoration.

### *Day Seven*

As I imagine what it must have been like to be the friar who lived in the cell with this wonderful window into heaven, I wonder if these heavenly figures became companions and

friends as day after day, year after year, the brother lived in their presence? Did this fresco give him entrance into the heavenly liturgy captured so graciously in Angelico's rendering of the Coronation? Today as I gaze at the painting I feel transported, caught up into this heavenly moment of glory that flows out continuously from the throne of God and the Lamb. Caught up in the tender majestic eternal moment of the honoring of the fairest flower of our race, I feel awed to be allowed to glimpse such an intimate moment.

### *Day Eight*

Today the fresco reveals to me a celebration of the Communion of Saints. All the saints of heaven share the glory and honor Mary is receiving from her Son and Mary's joy is magnified in all her beloved children who share in the glory and honor she is given by the Blessed Trinity.

Today as I gaze at the mandala; it seems to show the figures of Thomas, Benedict, Dominic, Francis, Peter Martyr and Mark as rays of the mandala; rays being drawn up into the sacred circle and yet at the same time rays emanating from the mandala as the fruits of Mary's queenship. Queen of Apostles, Queen of Martyrs, Queen of Doctors, Queen of Mendicants, Queen of Evangelists, Queen of All Saints.

### *Day Nine*

"We sing your praises, holy Mother of God. You gave birth to our Savior, Jesus Christ; watch over all who honor you." As we sang this Magnificat antiphon at Vespers today, I had before my mind's eye Angelico's fresco of the Coronation. Christ placing the crown on his mother's head seems to me a heavenly solemnization by the Blessed Trinity of the Son's giving us into the care of his mother as he did on the cross when he entrusted John to her maternal care. Perhaps to be honored also carries the meaning of the antiphon "watch over those who honor you." Maybe we might think of the Crowning of Mary as her divine commissioning to be spiritual mother of all human beings. The Mother of God is also Mother of the Human Race.

### *Day Ten*

I continue to be struck by the notion that in this fresco the gesture of Christ offering the Crown to his mother Mary, and her bowing in a beautiful gesture of acceptance, images for us her acceptance of her role as "spiritual mother" to all those for whom her Son died on the cross. The crowning signifies her desire and acceptance of a role that calls her to birth souls into eternal life through the grace of her beloved Son, Jesus Christ. ✠

## BEAUTY, CONTEMPLATION, AND THE VIRGIN MARY<sup>1</sup>

Sr. Thomas Mary, O.P.  
North Guilford, CT

St. Thomas, in his exposition of Dionysius, holds that both God and creatures are beautiful. Since God, the supreme Beauty, is his own existence, *ipsum esse subsistens*, and all things have being by participating in his existence, beauty can be found in all existing beings.<sup>2</sup>

He [Dionysius] shows how God is the Cause of brilliance, when he adds that God with a flash sends down to all creatures a share of His luminous ray, and it is the source of all light. These glittering communications of the divine ray should be understood according to the participation of likeness. And these communications are "pulchrifying," that is, producing beauty in things.<sup>3</sup>

St. Thomas continues his exposition:

"Brilliance pertains to the consideration of beauty.... Every form, by which a thing has being [esse], is a participation in the divine brilliance. This is why he [Dionysius] adds that 'individual things' are 'beautiful according to a character of their own,' that is, in accord with a proper form. Hence it is clear that the being [esse] of all things is derived from the divine Beauty."<sup>4</sup>

In his *Summa Theologiae* St. Thomas gives three distinguishing characteristics of beauty: wholeness or integrity, proportion or harmony, and *claritas* which can be translated splendor, radiance, light, brilliance. The chief characteristic is *claritas*, 'radiance' ... beautiful things shine.<sup>5</sup>

The beautiful illuminates our *intellectus* with the intuition of understanding. The eyes and ears of our soul enable our vision to see the transcendent beauty present ontologically in all being.<sup>6</sup>

Hans Urs von Balthasar expresses it succinctly:

The beautiful is above all a Form, and the light does not fall on this Form from above and from outside, rather it breaks forth from the Form's interior.<sup>7</sup>

This paper will attempt to highlight beauty of spirit, the inner splendor which radiates from the form and bears witness to what beauty really is.<sup>8</sup>

St. Thomas, in his commentary on the metaphysics of Aristotle, gives a lengthy distinction between the true and the good, and offers us the insight that "a spiritual substance relates to reality in two different ways. A human being directs himself at things by knowing them and desiring them. The object of knowledge is truth, while the object of desire is the good."<sup>9</sup> This writer would suggest a third way of relating to reality in which knowledge and desire are united in breathtaking vision. The splendor of truth and goodness radiating from the form captivates the one who *sees with love*,<sup>10</sup> drawing him or her into a third way of ecstatic contemplation and intuitive wisdom. Beauty, therefore, is essentially a gift, a radiant vision



presented to the eyes or ears of the beholder, a seeing or hearing of being clearly, that is, in the radiance of its inner splendor, *claritas*.

This third way of ecstatic contemplation partakes of cognition as a *gift of wondrous seeing* with the eyes of the spirit. It is more than a knowing by which the known is in the knower, although it is that, but rather a being taken out of oneself by which *the knower is in the known*. Beauty is therefore not so much an assimilation as a being assimilated.<sup>11</sup> St. Thomas in speaking of contemplation says: "To suffer ecstasy means to be placed outside oneself."<sup>12</sup> This happens not by a movement toward the beautiful but rather by a dispositive attitude of receptivity in which one is inundated with love, peace and joy in the splendor of truth and goodness being revealed. Commenting on Dionysius, (*In Dion. de div. nom. 4.10*), St. Thomas says that it belongs to the notion of the beautiful that apprehension finds its rest in its sight, or cognition.<sup>13</sup> Beauty is the gifted perfection of *seeing*. It unites the intellect and will in the innermost sanctuary of the soul.

In the light of the above this writer would suggest that the proper place of beauty is in the spirit. The vision of beauty radiates and bears witness to the spiritual reality of *esse* shining in the *res*, awakening the most intimate depths of the human person. It captivates the mind and will in contemplative wonder and ecstatic contemplation. Beauty integrates the splendor of light with ecstatic joy. Ultimately, the vision of beauty bears witness to the divine beauty "which shines with dazzling light.... While remaining completely intangible and invisible, it fills minds that know how to close their eyes with the most beautiful splendours."<sup>14</sup> Beauty is "*intimior intimo meo*" (St. Augustine, Conf., 1,3,6,11); it is a sign of the presence of God in all creation.

The divine beauty, shining through creaturely being, can perhaps be more easily contemplated in the figure of the Virgin Mary. Mary, by reason of her fullness of grace and immaculate conception, is the most perfect example of beauty in created being. Johann Roten, S.M., in a philosophically based article, "Mary, the Way of Beauty,"<sup>15</sup> reiterates Thomistic teaching by saying that what makes Mary truly beautiful is the splendor of form. For St. Albert the Great as well as for St. Thomas Aquinas, the identifying concept of beauty is splendor of form (3 Sent., d.23, q.3.al, sol.1, ad 2; *ST Ia 5,4, ad1*). Although there may be a certain beauty in sensible appearance, the greater beauty comes from the inward metaphysical form, since it is the essence that enlightens the mind and constitutes the *esse* of the *res*. According to St. Albert, where the shining light of essence is able to overcome the opacity of its material density and manifest itself in outward appearance, there is beauty (St. Albert, *De pulchro et bono, ql, a.2.*).<sup>16</sup>

Therefore what makes Mary truly beautiful is the *splendor of form*. Only the *splendor* of the metaphysical form outshines the actual form in Mary.

Mary's "form" is graced with the surplus of the divine. Mary's form is the work of the Holy Spirit, modeling cause of all that is.

What our eyes and ears perceive in Mary is the humble servant of the Lord. This is the outward form of her personality.

[But] her outward form is bathed in and literally drowning in the splendor of the inward form – her immaculate conception and fullness of grace. In Mary there

is far more than what meets the eye. The overwhelming splendor of her figure reveals the trinitarian groundedness of her being.<sup>17</sup>

Paul IV, in an address to the 1975 Mariological Congress held in Rome, linked Mary, "the woman clothed with the Sun" (Rev 12:1) with the divine beauty of the Holy Spirit, the one "in whom the pure radiance of human beauty meets the tremendous but accessible beauty of divinity."<sup>18</sup> The human beauty of her being shines like the sun because of the divine beauty in which she participates unimpeded.

The Virgin Mary stands as an icon at the pinnacle of creation revealing the beauty hidden in created being. In all being there is more than meets the eye.<sup>19</sup> The beauty of Mary reveals the beauty hidden in each being, as Cause present in effect, according to its place in the hierarchy of being.

The reality of beauty as a transcendental quality of being invites one to enter the world of contemplation wherein beauty gives herself freely and without personal regard.

Beauty introduces one to the inexhaustible riches of being and makes one realize the gratuitous character of all being. True beauty is the privilege of love, because love alone is able to detect beauty as gift freely given. Beauty contains meaning, amazement, joyful and grateful understanding.<sup>20</sup>

Mary, the bearer of Him who is Beauty, invites the contemplative to participate in her own wondrous gaze, a gifted perfection of *seeing* that is sustained and directed by the Holy Spirit of divine love.

COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO YEARN FOR ME,  
AND BE FILLED WITH MY FRUITS.<sup>21</sup>

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## NOTES

1. This article, originally entitled "Evidence For Beauty As a Transcendental," is an abridgment of a paper from the Theological Formation Program. It has been slightly modified for *Dominican Monastic Search*.
2. *In Dion. De div. Nom. 4.5* as quoted in *The Pocket Aquinas*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Washington Square Press, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1965), p. 269.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 272.
5. *ST*, 1a, 39, 8.
6. See John Saward, *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), pp. 40-47.
7. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone*, trans. and ed. by Alexander Dru (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 157.

8. St. Thomas, in explaining Dionysius' statement that God "gives beauty to all created being in accord with the limitations of each," says: "For there is one kind of beauty of the spirit and another of the body, and another of this and that body," *The Pocket Aquinas*, p. 269.
9. *In VI Metaph., lect. 4, 1234* as quoted in Jan A. Aersten, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), Aersten, p. 247. (In ft. nt. no. 8, Aersten refers to and quotes from *De verit.* 21.3: "*Cognitio et voluntas radicanter in substantia spirituali super diversas habitudines eius ad res.*" The reference should read: *De verit.* 23.1.
10. Love is still primary in some way. One person sees God more perfectly than another because of the degree of charity. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, Ia, 12, 6, co.
11. "The light ... stems from the object which, while revealing itself to the subject, it draws the subject into the sphere of the object." Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone*, p. 157.
12. *ST*, 1a2ae, 28.3.
13. *Ibid.*, 1a2ae, 27.1, ad. 3: "The beautiful adds, over and above the good, a certain relation to the power of knowing; so that we call good that which simply pleases the appetite, but, we call beautiful that whose very apprehension pleases," as quoted in Etienne Gilson, *Elements of a Christian Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 176.
14. Dionysius the Areopagite, *Theologia mystica*, from an address by John Paul II and quoted here according to "L'osservatore Romano," 26 January 2000, p. 11.
15. Johann G. Roten, S.M., "Mary and the Way of Beauty," *Marian Studies* (Annual Publication of the Mariological Society of America, Marian Library, Dayton University), XLIX (1998), 109-127.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117. There is no intention here to suggest a plurality of forms. Rather "form" is being used here according to the Theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar and is not in opposition to the metaphysics of St. Thomas. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikskis; ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983). For a consideration of form in relation to beauty see pp. 117-121.
18. Paul VI, Allocutio: "In auditorio Pontificii Athenaei a Sancto Antonio in Urbe ob coactos Conventus, VII Mariologicum atque XIV Marianum, 16 maii 1975," in AAS 67 (1975): 334-449, quoted here according to "Mary and the Way of Beauty," *Marian Studies*, p. 109.
19. "In pre-modern times ... beauty was still synonymous with being. With the Enlightenment, the concept of beauty changed. The world was no longer considered the many-splendored form of God's creative genius but human artifact, that is, the sum total of human experimentation and productivity," *ibid.*, p. 125.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
21. Sirach 24:18 (NAB).



## AT THE WELLSPRING OF TRINITARIAN COMMUNION: FOOTNOTE TO *VERBI SPONSA*

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### THE HEART AS ENCLOSURE

The bridal imagery of the Song of Songs provides a rich allegorical meaning of the heart as enclosure. Likewise, the Book of Revelation (14:4) uses the figure of the apocalyptic lamb being followed by the faithful virgins to depict bridal union in an eschatological context. The heart in which the contemplative nun encounters Christ is the seat of her soul, the place where she takes her divine bridegroom into the core of her being. For example, after receiving the Body of Christ in holy communion, the Dominican nun Adelheid Langmann of Engelthal saw the Christ Child playing in her heart which, like a monstrance, became as radiant as the sun.<sup>1</sup>

The heart is the place of mystical encounter described in sacramental terms by Clare von Ostren, a founding nun of the monastery of *Schonnensteinbach* in Alsace. She compares herself to a series of sealed chambers:

I enclose myself everyday in three locks: the first lock is the pure, clear and virginal heart of the Virgin Mary...the second lock is the good heart of our beloved Jesus Christ...the third lock is the Holy Sepulcher in which I hide myself with our Lord from the world.<sup>2</sup>

Material enclosure is also a state of mind and heart. A fourteenth century treatise from the Dominican monastery of Unterlinden in Colmar allegorizes the nuns' dormitory as the vigilant heart of the contemplative.<sup>3</sup> The monastery as the enclosed garden in the Song of Songs is also the place where the nuns, by receiving the daily Eucharist, can have a feast with the Trinity at the altar table. The union of the spouse with the Word passes into this transcendent realm. Holy Communion as the anticipation of union with the Trinity in heaven echoes passages from the Song of Songs (cf. 2:4, 5:1). The heart becomes all these enclosed spaces: wine cellar, banquet hall, enclosed garden and mystical chamber.<sup>4</sup> In the enclosure of the heart, the nun dwells in the inmost life of God and the Holy Spirit prays in this inner temple without ceasing.

### SPOUSAL LOVE WITH THE WORD

The focus of the rule of enclosure is God and his revealed Word, begotten in love. The Word of God is the heartbeat of Dominican monastic contemplative life. In an atmosphere charged with the Word, the whole being of the contemplative is attuned to the Gospel message in the ordinariness of her daily life. The Word is the fountainhead of her being; and the world, through the contemplative, needs to be rooted in the Word because it is from the Word that all things were made (cf. Jn. 1:3). A modern author expresses it this way:

The monastic life is an imploded life, its energy hidden as we disappear into the mystery of the hidden God, passing through silence into the life of the Word Incarnate who is the

center of all things. The hiddenness and silence of this life are pregnant with God; they are a straight path prepared for the final Advent of the risen Lord.<sup>5</sup>

The Word, enscriptured and incarnate, is the one and real Person in Christ; he is the Person *par excellence* who relates himself to humanity in his self-emptying love. In silence, solitude and community, the contemplative listens with singleness of mind and heart and heeds the call of God to love him with a spousal love. What does spousal love mean to a Dominican nun? It means to be united with and transformed in Christ – incarnate, crucified and glorified. It means to be fully human like Christ and be willing to drink from his chalice and witness to the joy of his resurrection. Spousal love urges the lover and beloved “to preach in word and silence the hiddenness of God in the burning bush, and the self-emptying of God on the Cross.”<sup>6</sup> A spouse is always aflame with the awareness of the one thing necessary. She is totally possessed by the reality and mystery of God and thus receives of his fullness, grace by grace (cf. Jn. 1:16).

### A HIDDEN SANCTUARY OF COMPASSION

Contemplative prayer, which moves silently and invisibly like sunburst, is signified in concrete by the edifice of a monastery. The monastery is a visual expression of God’s indwelling in the lives of Christian men and women called to the monastic contemplative life. Metaphorically, the cloister is a figure of the human person as God’s temple. The monastic community is meant to be the seedbed of authentic contemplation. It is the outward expression of the inward union between the contemplative and the Word of God in relation to the world. The nun’s deep quest for the Godhead within the enclosure broadens her perspective in the predicament of modern men and women by proclaiming in her vocation the transcendent dimension of the human person as image of God.

The Christian in a secularized society can easily turn away from the innermost center of being and become immersed in the fleeting awareness of the fast-changing external world. Withdrawal from being enclosed in self and walled in by secular humanism is what monastic writers call flight from unreality to a higher reality because

withdrawal from the world is a necessary condition for openness to the world. The nun sees the world as it truly is and loves it as God does. She opens her arms wide to the world, to that creation which rejoices the heart of God as he holds it in being each day. This is the deepest meaning of enclosure which is, fundamentally, an imagery, not of exclusion, but of cherishing, nurturing and protecting. The nun should never fear the world, never demean it or refuse to learn from it, but her openness to the world should never degenerate into worldliness. She should not choose creation and forget the Creator.<sup>7</sup>

With roots plunged underground, the nun learns to love the world rightly and have compassion on the multitude. She disappears from secular society in order to be everywhere in it in the inmost sanctuary of her compassionate love. John, a monk of St. Sabbas monastery, bears witness to this when he says:

Inside the monastery walls, the monk is not outside the world but at the heart of the world, beyond time. Free to leave, he chooses to remain; free to sleep, he wakes out of love; he sees without eyes, listens in silence. Free to take, he prefers to give.<sup>8</sup>

## COMMUNITY AS DWELLING IN THE INMOST LIFE OF GOD

The love of the Father and the Son coalesces into one love, the Spirit, who binds them in the profoundest of unions, a community of love that opens toward a created universe. Aquinas succinctly expresses it by saying that "the Father and the Son, by the Holy Spirit or Love proceeding, are said to love both each other and us."<sup>9</sup> Another Dominican theologian refines this point:

The mutual love of Father and Son, far from being an absorption of each into the other, is the primordial ground of a mysterious creative productivity at the heart of love.... This is what is meant in saying that the Holy Spirit is the mutual love of Father and Son, namely, that he is the personal issue of that love in its purely altruistic character.<sup>10</sup>

The three Divine Persons subsist in one existence; this triunity is the prototype of religious community. The creative power of the Trinity summons a monastic community into being "a communion founded, built up and made firm in the one Spirit. It is in the Spirit that the nuns receive the Word from God the Father with one faith, contemplate him with one heart, and praise him with one voice" (LCM 3:I).

There is also a correlated passage from Hill which states that "the effect of the Spirit's presence among us is the binding into community. As the oneness in love of the Father and the Son, the Spirit is the unitive source of the oneness of believers with God and so with one another. He is a Presence, but an active, living, efficacious presence, creative of a fellowship of love."<sup>11</sup>

This convivial fellowship and caring relationships provide a supportive milieu where communication and collaboration will flourish and bear abundant fruit. Because community mirrors forth the Trinity in the sphere of non-divine reality, its intimacy with the mystery of Christ is lived in the human level and demands redemptive suffering of its members. The fruits of solitude and enclosure are tested in the crucible of community life as the theological reflections of a Trappist monk aptly express this truth:

The astonishing fact of monastic community is that in spite of our evident human brokenness and in spite of our evident personal diversity, we can live together for a lifetime with a oneness and harmony that transcend all possible expectations. Ultimately, it is the power of the Holy Spirit of God that makes us one, makes us a community. We remain a community because the bonding power of the Spirit of Love is stronger than any divisive forces at work in our midst.<sup>12</sup>

Community life is harmoniously ordered to preserve the continual remembrance of God through the monastic rhythm of pairs: private and liturgical prayer, solitude and community, enclosure and hospitality, silence and chapter, work and recreation, study and *lectio divina*, authority and obedience, celibacy and friendship, poverty and common life, sickness and health, death and dying.

The Dominican nuns are united by and aspire to a common vision. They are guided by the same ideals and goals and formed through the Christ-experience of Saint Dominic. Praying in the Church, for the Church and with the Church, the nuns bear witness to the power that dwells within the inmost life of God. By their personal and communal listening to the Word and



giving voice to it in the liturgy, the nuns join their sacrifices and active works of love in the cloister with the preaching mission of the Order.

## ENCLOSURE AND ECCLESIAL MISSION

The Incarnate Word is the primordial sacrament and the Church continues the sacramental life of Christ on earth. The flowering of the baptismal promise through the contemplative life is the nuns' response to the call of the Father, realizing and completing the redemptive work of the Son in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Consecrated life is deeply rooted in the mystery of Christ (Word), the Church (mission) and eschatology (beatific vision). By giving themselves totally to the Word, the nuns anticipate the eschatological fulfillment and become the prototype of the life to come. Aidan Nichols brings this out with more precision:

Contemplative women in the Church are traditionally ranked above the ministerial priesthood; their consummate activity anticipates the simultaneous completeness of activity yet rest in heaven, whereas the task of priests belongs with the struggle to sanctify the people of God on earth. That particularly 'hierarchical ordering' is sealed in the Blessed Virgin Mary....<sup>13</sup>

The sacramental presence of a monastery in a town or city kindles the faith, hope and love in the human spirit. A monastic community "free for God alone," is a sacrament of *agape* where the wounds of the entire world are meant to find the infinite mercy of God. In "Choruses from 'The Rock,'" T.S. Eliot's juxtapositions penetrate the cultural fogs of secular society:

Endless invention, endless experiment,  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;  
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
Knowledge of words, but ignorance of the Word.  
All of our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,  
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death.  
But nearness to death no nearer to God.  
Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?  
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries  
Bring us further from God and nearer to the Dust.<sup>14</sup>

## CONCLUSION

What will become of sinners? What will become of men and women who stray from the truth; of those who hunger for the Word of God and grope for inner meaning in their lives; of our brothers and sisters who experience the dark side of prayer and the seeming absence of God; of people who suffer the gnawing sense of self-alienation and identity loss; and of skeptics and pragmatists who demand that divine truths be seen and touched?

The preaching of the Word must continue for "the brethren of the Order, 'commissioned entirely for spreading abroad the Word of God,' fulfill their vocation primarily by preaching. The nuns, while commissioned by God primarily for prayer, are not for that reason excluded from

the ministry of the Word for they listen to the Word, celebrate it and keep it in their hearts, and in this way proclaim the Gospel of God by the example of their life (LCM 96:I)<sup>15</sup>

The nuns' life of prayer is a privileged means for the re-evangelization of culture in the sense that they can uncover the Christian roots of secular society by fulfilling their vocation, by being in mission together with their brothers and sisters in the Order. The Dominican monastic experience is never exclusive and isolated but always related to the Church. There is immense freedom within the boundaries of cloister. Monastic enclosure is a means of entry into a wider and higher world that is all-inclusive, uniting the contemplative with the whole creation in solidarity with the Church and the Order in their relation to God and humankind.

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## NOTES

1. Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 144.
2. *Ibid.*, 159; quoted from the *Buch der Reformatio Predigerordens*, a chronicle of Dominican Observance compiled by Johannes Meyer (d. 1485).
3. *Ibid.*, 160.
4. *Ibid.*, 146.
5. Christine Fox, "Seeking God: Monastic fidelity in an Age of Unbelief" in *Monastic Studies* 18 (Montreal: Benedictine Priory, 1988), 106.
6. Cf. *ibid.*, 104.
7. Cf. Fox, 95, 107 nn. 27, 28.
8. Quoted by Jean Leclercq, "Christian Monasticism and its Present Encounter with Other Religious Traditions" in *Monastic Studies* 18, 74.
9. *Summa Theologiae*, I q.37, a.2.
10. William J. Hill, O.P., *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 75.
11. *Ibid.*, 303.
12. Charles Cummings, OCSO, *Monastic Practices* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1986), 152.
13. *Christendom Awake: On Re-energizing the Church in Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1999), 127.
14. Excerpted by Thomas J. McDonnell, *Listening to the Lord in Literature* (Canfield, Ohio: Alba House, 1977), 33.
15. Cf. *Venite Seorsum*, V; cf. *Verbi Sponsa* 7.

## A REFLECTION ON MEMORY AND CONTEMPLATION

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To be a creature is to be made by the Creator and to be held in existence by that same Creator/Preserver of all life. If from the first moment of my existence when the sperm of my father united with the ovum of my mother, I came into being through the power of God's creative act, where is the memory of that contact, that touching between God and me in the act of my creation? Could it be that the desire, the longing, the yearning, the aching I experience for God is the memory? The memory of my creation and a memory of God? Of the God whose goodness overflows in the loving act of creating and sustaining human beings made in his image?

Augustine writes of God's image within us as a trinity of powers: memory, intellect and will. In our journey back to the Source we are guided by these powers. Our Christian tradition also teaches that these powers need to be purified, transformed, freed from sin and the effects of sin. Works on the spiritual life often speak about active and passive purifications. If I picture the spiritual life as a dance then it is in the ascetical or active part of the journey that I take the lead in the dance, and work to bring memory, intellect and will under the control of right reason. In the passive or mystical part God takes the lead in the dance and invites me to allow the Spirit to purify my powers at such a deep level that I find I can one day say with Paul: "I live, now not I but Christ lives in me." This purification begins, I think, with a strong pull on our spirit to enter into contemplative prayer. God calls me to enter into myself and to travel back beyond remembered remembrances to the place where God creates and sustains me; the place where God and I touch. This calls for a tremendous emptying and letting go. It can feel like being drawn into a great abyss. I stand on the brink and feel dizzy at the thought of falling into the infinite. I wonder: won't a finite creature be swallowed up in the infinite and disappear? What is it that can give me the courage to jump into the arms of the infinite when it feels like annihilation? Ah! But isn't there a spark of the infinite in me? And don't I name it "desire"? Aren't my desires for God infinite – don't I experience them as such?

What is the origin of these desires? Where do they come from? I would like to suggest that they arise out of what I want to call our "primal memory." **Primal memory** is the memory at the very core or beginning of myself. It takes me back to the time when I was not and then I was, to the moment of my creation. I remember my creation when I touch my "primal memory." It is of course beyond images, words, and forms. How do I contact or get in touch with this "first memory"? One way is in contemplative prayer, that prayer beyond images, words, or forms where I just come to rest in God. I think this resting in God is a resting in our "primal memory."

The experience of resting in our "primal memory" lifts me out of my ordinary experience of time and space. It is an exploration of my deep inner space and yet paradoxically it is often triggered by an outward place such as a sunrise or sunset in the garden, observing the pattern on a butterfly wing, or a line of poetry or a passage from a book. These very ordinary concrete things/places/spaces can transport me beyond my usual experience. I lose all awareness of time; it is as if I step into the "timeless," that place the Church keeps bringing us back to in her liturgy: *Hodie*, Today, Now. The place of "God's time" where it is always Now. Often these are



brief encounters with the "timeless" and once I become aware that I have been taken out of myself, the moment is over and my reflective consciousness returns.

Another aspect of resting in my "primal memory" is that although this kind of experience happens to me "alone" yet it is also a moment when I experience most profoundly a oneness with all other human beings, indeed with all that has being.

Experience of the "primal memory" is simultaneously an experience of "primal knowing" and "primal loving." To travel back to the now of this memory, this knowing, this loving, is to reach back to the moment when I was not and then to realize that I am! This puts me in touch with an infinitely loving Power/ Person/ God/ Trinity. I wonder if Catherine writing, in the *Dialogue*, of the Father saying to her: "I am he who is and you are she who is not," is communicating out of an experience of touching her own "primal memory"?

To remember myself created out of nothing is to remember myself loved unconditionally. It is an overwhelmingly wonderful unitive experience. This place of the primal memory is an infinitely safe place, a peace-filled place, a loving place. I think we all desire to live continuously in this "primal memory." It is our hearts' deepest desire. And it is possible. But we must be willing to be purified, for without first letting Love burn away all the traces of sin in us we could not sustain consciously living in the light of this "primal memory." I think our self-definition would feel too threatened, for to live in this memory the false-self (the projected-self, whatever we want to call that outer or surface-self) must be replaced by the true inner self which is the self perfectly conformed to the image of Christ. "I live, now no longer I but Christ lives in me."

Perhaps some of the most difficult sayings of the mystics arise out of the experience of "primal memory"?

To reach satisfaction in all  
desire its possession in nothing.  
To come to possess all  
desire the possession of nothing.  
To arrive at being all  
desire to be nothing  
To come to the knowledge of all  
desire the knowledge of nothing.  
To come to the pleasure you have not  
you must go by a way you enjoy not....

John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*  
Chapter 13 Number 11

When one stands on the brink of what seems an abyss of nothingness desiring to jump into the arms of the Infinite, is there anything one can do to muster the courage to jump? Perhaps efforts at silence, solitude, contemplative living, are all practice at being ready for the moment when God leads inward to that "primal memory." In the Letter to the Hebrews we read: "Therefore a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God. And he who enters into God's rest, rests from all his own works as God did from his (4:9-10)." Perhaps to enter into a Sabbath rest is to travel inward to the abode of one's "primal memory." There – safe, loved, and at peace – I can rest from my work. Perhaps contemplative prayer is a resting in God, a resting in our "primal memory," and a practicing for heaven's Sabbath rest.



## THE FATHER IN PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

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I like to look at Paul's letter to the Romans as two huge murals facing each other on either side of a long passageway. A passageway through which every human person must walk. The one mural portrays the stark picture of the history of humanity without God, worse, a humanity that has rejected and rebelled against God. The other mural portrays the Father in the midst of the chaos – his Son, lifted up on the Cross – lifting up with himself the prostrate form of humanity by the love of Their Spirit. This Spirit of love from the Cross is pouring over us, into us. Cleansing, vivifying the dead bones. Humankind rises – free from bondage.

**The One Mural:** Romans tells a bleak, black story: Corruption is universal; coming from Adam whose fault has been transmitted to his descendants. It has deeply infected human nature:

Through one man sin entered into the world... by the offense of one, the many died. By the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners (Rom 5:12-19').

The flesh in its tendency is at enmity with God; it is not subject to God's law. Indeed, it cannot be; those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom 8:7). Isn't this reason for despair?

Not only does Paul portray universal corruption, but individual alienation as he tells of his own struggle:

We know that the law is spiritual, whereas I am weak flesh sold into the slavery of sin. I cannot even understand my own actions. I do not do what I want to do but what I hate...What a wretched man I am! Who can free me from this body doomed to death? (Rom 7:14, 15, 24).

**The Second Mural:** Here is portrayed in deft, bold, clear lines that God is our Father and that this Father has a plan for Jews and Gentiles. This is God's and Paul's good news, the gospel of salvation, the gift of Jesus Christ, the Son, to us. Paul, with the strongest colors, paints in this letter the complete need, the complete gift of it. By the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, all humanity is called – out of despair and isolation – to holiness. Paul preaches the favor, the grace of the Father, the favor extended to us in His Son, the grace offered to all who believe – Jews and Gentiles alike. ALL. Mercy and love freely bestowed. The Romans had their law, their government, their armies, but:

It is not a question of man's willing or doing but of God's mercy (Rom 9:16). The Father's Mercy.

All have sinned and fall short of God's glory. They are now justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus (Rom 3: 23). But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace (Rom 11:6).

God's gifts and his call are irrevocable (Rom 11:29).

With powerful persuasion Paul says that we have been made righteous through faith; baptized into Christ's death, buried with him; raised from the dead with him to live a new life



(Rom 6:3). Our inheritance is through faith. Abraham, our father in faith, who teaches us faith, has received the promises of God for us. Paul definitely had fatherhood in mind when he wrote, in chapter 4, of Abraham justified through faith and becoming father of us all by believing in the promises God the Father made to him:

He is the father of us all, which is why Scripture says: "I have made you father of many nations." Yes, he is our father in the sight of God in whom he believed, the God who restores the dead to life and calls into being those things which had not been (Rom 4:16).

In a sense, the Father begot another father, Abraham, passing on His fatherhood, making him fruitful; making Sarah a mother; making us children of the promises.

Paul points us toward the Father. Again and again in this letter Paul shows us the Father as involved, as raising his Son from the dead and we are given hope and peace through believing. "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life" (Rom 6:4). Notice that Paul does not say "have a new life" but "live a new life." Paul's concept of life and love is very dynamic. The Father does not make us cream puffs.

Now that we have been justified by faith, we are at peace with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have gained access by faith to the grace in which we now stand, and we boast of our hope for the glory of God (Rom 5:1-2).

"We have gained access" – no separation. Paul boasts, he speaks with extravagance because the Father gives with extravagance.

### **The Father's Action through the Son, through the Holy Spirit**

Recall the picture of stark failure and despair and again the picture on the other side. Faith comes bringing hope. Misery is lifted from us by the gift of the Father. Paul squarely faces the sufferings we bear but he proclaims what strength we now have:

We even boast of our afflictions! We know that affliction makes for endurance, and endurance for tested virtue, and tested virtue for hope. And this hope will not leave us disappointed, because the love of God [the Father] has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:3-5).

Paul's enthusiasm mounts and pours out as does the Father's love:

At the appointed time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for us godless men. It is rare that anyone would lay down his life for a just man, though it is barely possible that for a good man someone may have the courage to die. It is precisely in this that God [our Father] proves his love for us: that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:6-8).

Our world seeks proof. The Father's gift of his Son, even unto death – is this proof enough for us? The Father is anxious that we shall see it. He created us only that we would see it!

The action portrayed in the letter to the Romans is twofold: *the Father pouring out his love into our hearts*<sup>2</sup> and *the Father proving his love* by giving his very own Son, even to the folly of the Cross. This letter shows the Blessed Trinity in our wounded world, bearing our

anguish, giving us a vibrant, daring hope. We are reconciled. Cleansed, vivified from the inside out. Visualize again the Father lifting us from our misery, standing us up on our two feet. An image of the Father might be two hands extended towards us. In one hand is the burning Heart of his Son; in the other the pulsing love of his Spirit. Or the One God who has two hands extended to us – one hand is the Son, the other is the Spirit. (Ireneaus).

...we were reconciled to him by the death of his Son, it is all the more certain that we who have been reconciled will be saved by his life (Rom 5:10).

The secret of the Father's plan is, in a word, grace. By the word *grace*, biblical language designates both the prevenient and generous love of God and his completely free gift. When we say that God gives his grace, we understand that the Father takes the initiative in granting favors. God freely gives us his Son, his Son gives his life, the Spirit is given to us for all our living and dying. For St. Paul grace is not a thing; it is God himself, living and giving himself; or we could say, it is his relationship of charity and generosity with us all.<sup>3</sup>

"Superabundance" is the invariable quality of grace – of charity infused by God and of life lived in Christ:

The law came in order to increase offenses; but despite the increase of sin, grace has far surpassed it, so that, as sin reigned through death, grace may reign by way of justice leading to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 5:20).

Paul creates a new word in Greek to express his thought: "*uperprepisseusen*." One compound Greek word needing three English words to express his thought. "Has far surpassed." We have heard of "hyper-active" or "super-generous" or "hyper-sensitive." Here is Paul saying that grace has super-, hyper-abounded over sin. Superabundance should be the quality of my life now. Do I live the daily happenings in a spirit of superabundance of God's presence and victory? Or do tension, frustration, anger, petulance, envy, criticism abound instead? God's gifts are not only for the taking, but for the using.

## The Mighty Chapter Eight

Chapter 8 of Romans reaches a high point, if not the highest in all Paul's letters. It is unique in its ardor of affirming the love of God – "God" is used 18 times in this one chapter. God is present as our Now, in our now. Not always named as "Father" but understood as such. If God is present he is eternally present – that is, always present, never changing or changing his mind or his plan to draw us to himself – to life. God is not retro-active, but the Originator, the Activator – only for our good. Grace – God is "leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:21).

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will bring your mortal bodies to life also, through his Spirit dwelling in you (Rom 8:11).

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of adoption through which we cry out, "Abba!" (that is, "Father"). The Spirit himself gives witness with our spirit that we are children of God. But if we are children, we are heirs as well, heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so as to be glorified with him (Rom 8:14-17).

Notice the verbs: raised, bring to life, dwelling, led, receive, cry out, gives witness, suffer, glorified. Note especially the present tense of “are” in “are children,” “are heirs.” A powerful paragraph. The Spirit is graphically described as leading out of fear, out of slavery, into a new family bond as children, as destined for glory. Paul names God “Abba” and takes pains to translate the intimate Aramaic into Greek. Paul wants no mistaking the fact. God is my tender Father, Daddy, Papa, close, loving us as his children. And then – astounding fact – an heir. Everything is ours, “Heirs of God.” Paul repeats with a significant nuance: “co-heirs of Christ” related and rich! If only we stick close to him in whatever we have to suffer.

The Spirit is personified as giving witness with our spirit, helping us, groaning in the midst of humanity's pain, “interceding as God himself wills” (Rom 8:26, 27). Never alone. Never. This gives birth to Paul's exclaiming in utter confidence and assurance:

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God (Rom 8:14). We know – [we know!] – that God [the Father] makes all things – everything – work together for the good of those who love him (Rom 8:28).

Everything working for our good. No exception. Not one.

There follow five verbs: two describe the Father in contemplation – gazing at a vista of glory children – freed from the bondage of sin and decay – shining in his Son; the other three verbs show the Father in action – in getting things done – manifesting – his Son accomplishing a mystery of glory for Themselves and for us. All this is a present tense in God. All this is a present, a gift from God.

...He (the Father) *foreknew* – he *predestined us to share* the image of his Son – another dynamic purpose of the Father: that the Son might be the first-born of many brothers – he *called* – he *justified* – he in turn, *glorified* (Rom 8:29-30).

Our God is not a cream puff, either, sitting in a comfortable lounge up there somewhere far off.

These thoughts of God are deeds accomplished in us and for us. Paul reveals the Father as planning to give us his Son, who is born first and then gives birth to us, freed from sin, walking now in the Spirit as children of God – destined for glory. Glory is the other panel – Glory could be another name for the Father.

## The Apogee

Paul's ardor in chapter eight grows ever more in momentum: he immediately shouts out nine burning questions, one after the other:

What shall we say after that?  
If God is for us, who can be against us?  
Is it possible that he who did not spare his own Son but handed  
him over for the sake of us all will not grant all things besides?  
[Notice the tiny word *all* repeated twice.]  
Who shall bring a charge against God's chosen ones?  
God who justifies?  
Who shall condemn them?  
Christ Jesus, who died or rather was raised up,



who is at the right hand of God [the Father]  
and who intercedes for us? (Rom 8: 31-34).

Then the final climactic question confronting the deepest needs and fears suffered by the human person:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Trial or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? (Rom 8: 35).

The answer is voiced through the question: No separation is possible! Even though slain every day – looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered! It is the apogee of Paul's proclamation.

Yet in all this [again notice the word *all* ] we are more than conquerors because of him who has loved us (Rom 8:37).

"More than conquerors" is once again in Greek one compound word Paul creates to express the breadth of the truth he sees in all its splendor. "Because of him who has loved us." In Greek it reads "the One loving us" – Paul's name for God. Present tense again. And he rushes on:

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God [the Father] that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord (Rom 8:38-39).

## **The Heart of Romans**

Paul's certainty is as a mountain ablaze in a dark night. At this stage of his life, Paul has been through just about everything. "I am convinced" – nothing can daunt, nothing can deter, nothing can separate us – Is not the fear of separation the hardest part in the lives of those who love one another? This, for me, is the heart of Paul's letter. While John in his Gospel will address directly our yearning for oneness "I pray that they may be one in us" (Jn 17:21), Paul confronts our deepest fear which is: "I am weak and insignificant, a sinner doomed to die. I will be forgotten, excluded, fall away, torn away – separated from love, union and security." It is an approach from the dark panel – through the dark panel. Here is a bold, flaming assertion that no one or nothing can separate us from the love that comes and is coming at every moment of our lives from the Father through his Son, handed over *for* us. Handed over *to* us. Paul sees the love that will never fail us. Never. "Who shall condemn them? Christ Jesus, who died or rather was raised up, who is at the right hand of God [the Father] and who intercedes for us?" (Rom 8:34). Rather, this love glorifies all who believe. Nothing can separate us from the love of God – our Father – absolutely nothing. We are more than conquerors...in the groaning travail of all creation.

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31). This is Paul's picture of the Father. There, eternally, for us. Planning a present destiny, a way of life provided for by God's provident riches. The riches of his mercy.

## **Mercy to All**

Chapters 10 and 11 spell out the triumph of Mercy:

No one who believes in him will be put to shame. Here there is no difference between Jew and Greek; all have the same Lord, rich in mercy toward all who call upon him (Rom 10: 11-12).

Just as you were once disobedient to God and now have received mercy through their [the Jews'] disobedience, so they have become disobedient – since God wished to show you mercy – that they too may receive mercy. God has imprisoned all in disobedience that he might have mercy on all.

How deep are the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How inscrutable his judgements, how unsearchable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has given him anything so as to deserve return? For from him and through him and for him all things are. To him be glory forever. Amen (Rom 11:30-36).

Mercy is extended to all. Paul gazes on the Mystery of this God who has no counselor or comprehender. All humanity faces the story of the dark mural and says to the Father: To you be glory, the glory you so mercifully share with us. With Paul we bow down in worship.

### **Our Response to Mercy**

Chapters 12 to 15 give us the ethical moral response the Father asks of us through Christ.

And now, brothers and sisters, I beg you through the mercy of God to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God's will, what is good, pleasing and perfect (Rom 12:1-2).

...we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another (Rom 12:5).

If I am one body in Christ then this determines how I live for the Father. As a child of the same Father as Jesus.

Love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10). Use the faith you have as your rule of life in the sight of God (your Father) (Rom 14:22).

May God (your Father) the source of all patience and encouragement, enable you to live in perfect harmony with one another according to the spirit of Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and voice you may glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 14:5-6).

Another name for the Father: source of all patience and encouragement – enabling me to live with others – never separated from them either – to glorify and thank our Father. Praise issues from a grateful heart:

The Gentiles glorify God because of his mercy.... I will praise you among the Gentiles and I will sing to your Name.... Rejoice, O Gentiles with his people.... in him the Gentiles will find hope (Rom 15:9–12).

For Paul gratitude is not an interior sentiment, or even an eminent form of prayer, it is the permanent attitude of a sinful creature who knows she is loved with an infinite love. Her

gratitude must pour itself out in deeds for others (as her Father's does) and in a life that is full of praise and thanksgiving.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers (Rom 12:11, 13).

## **Conclusion: Hope – No Separation**

Paul concludes his letter with one more name of God the Father:

So may God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that through the power of the Holy Spirit you may have hope in abundance (Rom 15:13).

Father – source of hope – here the dark panel is faced for the last time in this letter. In the face of despair we have hope; we can possess all joy and peace (again that little word *all*). Paul harks back to that throbbing need of every human heart – no separation! Empowered with the Holy Spirit of God we can be full of hope – hope for what? No separation – from God. From those I love. From myself.

One body in Christ and individually we are members of one another (Rom 12:5).

Both in life and in death we are the Lord's...let us then, make it our aim to work for peace and to strengthen one another (Rom 14: 8, 19).

"Beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom 1:7).

Holiness is no separation, except from sin.

The Son takes us, Gentiles and Jews, to the Father, the great Originator and Source of all. Our hope, our living in Christ through the obedience of faith, gives glory – joy to the Father. No separation. The dark mural is not the last word.

If God is for us, who can be against us? Who can separate us from the love of Christ? I am certain that neither death nor life, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God – our Father – that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord (Rom 8:31, 38, 39).

This is the mystery Paul proclaims in his letter to the Romans.

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## **NOTES**

1. The Scripture references were taken mainly from the *New American Bible*, with a few from the *Revised Standard Version*.
2. Think of a mighty waterfall as an image of this "pouring." I like to picture Niagra Falls, close up.
3. See *The Trinity and Our Moral Life*, Chapter Two, "From the Father," by Ceslaus Spicq, O.P. (New York: Newman Press, 1963).



## ORIGEN'S HOMILY ON MAGDALEN

JOHN 20:11-19

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### I

The extreme love for the Savior proved by Magdalen will furnish the subject of my discourse today. You know she loved him more than all else, and followed him to the death at the same time as the disciples abandoned him. When he was buried she refused to leave him and remained at the tomb shedding tears. Mary, says the Evangelist, stayed near the tomb, weeping.

If we can, let us find out why she remained there and the cause of her tears so that we might gather some fruit from both the one and the other.

Love made her stay there and sorrow drew forth her tears. She remained to see if she could see him whom she sought with so much passion, but she wept because she was persuaded that someone had taken him away; her sorrow increased because, after having accompanied him to death with so much affliction, she now must weep for him as lost again. In her immense grief the presence of his cherished remains would be a consolation, and now she can do nothing to alleviate it. She fears lest her love for her Master grow cold when his body, itself frozen in death, would be capable of warming it.

She went to the tomb with perfumes to anoint in death the members of him on whose feet she had poured out perfume during his life, and as she had shed her tears on his sacred feet she wished also to weep at his tomb. But not finding his body as she had hoped, her affliction increased. Now she no longer thinks of embalming him, she is anxious only not to lose him forever.

She is so distressed that she no longer knows what she is doing. What else could she do but weep since her sorrow was great and she had no one to console her? Peter and John had come with her to the tomb; but not finding the body they sought, they returned. She, on the contrary, remained to regret its loss and to solace her pain by awaiting some consolation which she would have despaired of had she not had the power to hope. Peter and John feared and they fled. But she did not follow them. She feared nothing because after such great unhappiness, it seemed to her that she had nothing more to fear. She had lost her good Master, and without him she could neither love nor hope.

She had lost the life of her soul, and she knew that death would be better for her than life. In death she would meet him whom she could not find in life, since she could not live without him. Her love was like death, because what could death do to her that love had not already done? She appeared as one without a soul, and she looked as if she were oblivious of everything. Feeling she did not feel, seeing she did not see, hearing she did not hear, she is not present to herself, because she is entirely where her Savior is. She seeks for him and she

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<sup>1</sup>From the French translation by Bishop M. Coeffeteau, O.P. (Paris, 1625) included in Louis Chardon, O.P., *La Croix de Jésus* (ET: Josefa Thornton; St. Louis, Mo: Herder, 1959, v.II).

does not find him, that is why she remains at the tomb where she appears both disconsolate and unhappy.

But, O Magdalen, how is it that when the Apostles left the tomb you remained there after they left? Were you wiser, did you love more or did you fear less than these great men? You certainly did not wish to dispute their wisdom or their courage, you were only preoccupied with loving, and you could only complain of the loss of the one you loved. Shall I say that this woman had forgotten both joy and all fear? She forgot herself and all that was not him whom alone she loved. We could even say that she had forgotten him, since seeing him she did not know him, so much was she troubled by love and pain. She did not know him since she sought him in the tomb, because if she had remembered his words she would not be afflicted by his death. She would rejoice in his new life, she would not have believed a stranger took him, but that he had been raised by the power of the Father. He had said that he would be crucified and that he would rise on the third day; but sorrow had mastered her heart and obliterated the words. She had neither feeling, counsel, hope, or anything else except only the power to weep.

## II

As her tears were within her own power, she shed them abundantly, and in her desolation she stooped down, looked in the tomb, and saw two angels clothed in white robes who said to her: "Woman, why are you weeping?" Behold, assuredly this was a great consolation, O Magdalen, because you have met two among the living who seem to desire to lighten your sorrow. But how is it that he whom you seek seems to neglect your pain and scorn your tears? You pray to him and he does not hear you; you seek him without finding him; you knock and he does not wish to open, and the more you pursue him the more he seems to escape from you. What a strange change is taking place here! Before, he defended you from the murmuring of the Pharisee and the complaints of your sister. He praised you when you poured your perfume on his feet, when you washed them with your tears, and when you dried them with your hair; he consoled you and forgave your sins. In the past he sought you when you were absent, and had your sister tell you that he solicited your presence. "The Master is here," she said, "and he is asking for you."

Oh! Then, Magdalen rose promptly on hearing these words! And with what diligence she ran to cast herself at your feet, as she was accustomed to do, O good Jesus! When you saw her melt in tears, you could not restrain your own and you wept with her. How sweet was her consolation when she heard you ask the Jews where they had put Lazarus! And then, to recompense the love of her who loved you so passionately, it pleased you to raise him to life and to procure for Magdalen a joy truly ineffable.

Why do you show such coldness to her today? And how can you so treat her who seeks you with so much ardor?

We do not read that she had done anything up to this hour except to hasten to the tomb where you had been placed, to bring perfumes to embalm your body, since when she did not find you she returned to the apostles who saw the empty tomb and then left the place, while she remained to weep bitterly. If this is sinful it must be recognized that she is guilty. But if this is not a crime, but moreover the testimony of the love which she bore you and of the desire she had to see you, why do you hide yourself from her, you who love all those who love you, and who let yourself be found by those who seek you? You have said: "I love those who love me,

and those who seek me in the morning will find me." Why then does this woman who seeks you in the morning not find you? Why do you not dry the tears she sheds over you, as you did those that she shed for Lazarus her brother? And if you love her now, why do you wait so long to console her?

O Master, faithful and true! Remember how you testified of her when you spoke to her sister Martha: that she had chosen the better part by remaining at your feet to listen to your words. In truth, her choice could not have been better since you were the object. But how can it be true that she had not lost that which she had chosen if you distance yourself from her? And if she has not lost you, why is she seen shedding so many tears, or could it be that she has not looked for you enough? Certainly, she seeks what she has chosen and her tears come only from the displeasure at having lost that which was so precious to her. Because of this, O Savior of the world, preserve her in what she had chosen lest we have difficulty in putting faith in your word. If not before her eyes, at least be in her heart.

Why do you weep, O Magdalen? What are you waiting for? Let the sight of these angels who are with you console you and suffice for you. Maybe there is in you something that does not please him whom you seek, and that is the reason why he does not wish to see you. Put an end to your sadness, moderate or cease your weeping. Remember what he told you and the other women: "Do not weep over me." What is it that you are doing? He does not wish you to shed tears and that is what you do. I am afraid that your sighs offend him, because if he loved your tears, he would weep with you, as he did in another circumstance. Believe me, content yourself with the angels' consolation; remain with them. Ask them and they will be able to tell you where he is whom you seek and for whom you weep. As for me, I am persuaded that they did not come from heaven except to bear witness to him and that he whose absence you regret, sent them to announce his resurrection and console you in your pain.

And, in fact, the angels say to Magdalen: "Woman, why do you weep and why are you so sad? Open your heart to us and it may be that we can fill it with joy by telling you what you desire." But she, exhausted by her pain and as if out of herself, does not wish to receive any consolation. She does not even look at those who speak to her. She finds all consolation importune. She seeks her Creator. How, she says to herself, can creatures satisfy me! I do not wish to see angels; I feel that they trouble my soul in place of giving it peace. They have taken away my Creator; I seek only him; he alone can satisfy me. But I do not know where they have placed him whom they have taken away. I would find the place of his rest, but I have looked around everywhere and cannot find him.

### III

Where will I go and what will become of me? Where has my well-beloved gone? I have sought for him in vain at the tomb. I have called him and he has not answered. Where then shall I turn to find him? I have interrupted my sleep; I will rise and go to meet him whom my soul desires. O my eyes, shed tears, and you, my feet, run without rest and seek him whom I long to see. Alas! Where has the object of my joy gone, where has my love hidden, where are my dear delights? But you, my Savior, why have you left me? O sorrow! O insupportable pain! Anguish has enveloped me on all sides and I know not what I must do. It is a torture for me to remain in this place; and it would be the greatest sorrow for me to leave. I would much rather guard the tomb of my Lord, for fear that in my absence someone might take away his body and destroy his tomb. If I must, I will remain here and die here, so that my tomb might be near his.



Oh! How happy my body would be if that could happen and how joyful would my soul be if, leaving its prison, it might enter into this glorious tomb! Whether I die or live, never can I be separated from him. Why have I not foreseen all these events when they buried my Master? Why did I not remain with him? If I had acted thus, I would not now be weeping at his loss. I would have prevented his being taken away or at least I would have followed those who took him. But I desired to obey the law and I have not guarded him before whom these laws give way. To guard the body of my Savior would not be to violate them but to fulfill them. This death did not destroy the Passover, it renewed it; it did not defile it, on the contrary it purified those who are defiled; it healed those whom it touched and illumined those who drew near to participate in its splendor.

However, why make everything worse? I have abandoned him, I left, then returning to the tomb I found it open and empty. I stayed here and waited to see if I could find him anywhere around. But why stay here alone? Yet the disciples left. There was not one who wept with me, and no one made any effort to search for the Savior of the world with me. The angels appeared to me. I know not why. If it was to console me, they paid no attention to the reason for my sorrow. But they did not know since they asked me why I was weeping. Perhaps it was to prevent me from weeping. They would not have taken such trouble unless they did not want to see me die. Now I will not cease to weep and I will do so until the end of my life if I do not meet him whom I seek with so much sorrow.

What shall I do to find him? From whom shall I take counsel? Whom shall I call? Who will have compassion on me and wish to console me? Who will tell me where my well-beloved rests during the excessive heat of the day? I conjure those who listen to me to tell him that I languish with love and there is no sorrow like mine. Return, O holy object of my desires, give me the joy of your sweet presence. Show me your face and let your voice resound in my ears, because your voice is sweet and your face is comely. O my hope! Do not deprive me of the fruit of my expectation; cast but one glance of your eyes on me and I will be satisfied.

#### IV

As Magdalen was weeping in this way, she found herself face to face with the Savior, but without recognizing him. He said to her: "Woman, why do you weep and whom are you looking for?" O only desire of her soul! How can you ask her the reason for her tears? It was not long ago when she saw before her eyes, in cruelest agony, her hope attached to the tree of the cross, and you ask her why she weeps? She saw your hands which have so often blessed, your feet that she kissed and moistened with her tears, pierced with nails which fastened your body to the cross. She saw you give up your last breath; and you, the one object of her sorrow, ask her why she is afflicted. Desirous of having the consolation of embalming your body, she finds that someone has removed it and you say to her: "Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" You know, however, that she seeks only you, that she loves you so ardently that she scorns all things for your sake. O Master! How is it that you so test the courage of this woman? She had no other thought than that of your love; and if she despairs it is because she does not see you, you who are the only object of her hope. She seeks you, in such a way that she wishes to see only you. She does not think that she has found you. It is without doubt for this reason that she does not recognize you. She is outside of herself; your love has ravished her. Why ask her the cause of her tears and the object of her search! Do you think that she says to you: It is for you that I am weeping, it is you that I seek, if first you do

not speak to her heart, if you thus hide yourself, and if you refuse to make yourself known to her?

Believing that she is talking to a gardener, Magdalen says to him: "Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him and I will take him away." O sorrow, O passion unsurpassed! This woman was as if enveloped in a thick cloud of affliction; she could not see the sun which rose in the morning and now shines in her eyes. But because she languished with love, the eyes of her soul were so obscured by her grief that she does not see him who was before her eyes; that is to say she did not know the Savior to whom she spoke. O Magdalen! If you seek the spouse of your soul why do you not know him? And if you know him, why do you still seek him? Behold him before you, because it is he who asks you why you shed so many tears. By taking him for a gardener you were not altogether deceived, because in his goodness Jesus, as a careful gardener, casts all kinds of good seeds in your heart and in those of the faithful, and makes virtues spring up which he cultivates and waters with his graces. If you do not know him, it is not because he speaks to you, but because you seek him as dead, and a word is a sign of life. What hinders the Savior from manifesting his presence is that you do not seek him as you ought. You seek him in a state where he is not. There is nothing astonishing in that seeing him you do not recognize him.

O good Lord! I cannot completely excuse nor freely defend Magdalen's error. Still, I would say that what deceived her was that she sought you in the form where she had seen you when you were taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb. Sorrow made her lose all hope of seeing you alive, even though you had assured her of your resurrection. We could say that when Joseph of Arimathea had placed your body in the tomb, she buried with it her spirit, united so inseparably with it that it had been easier for her to die than to detach it. Yes, the soul of Magdalen was more in your body than in her own, and in seeking your body she had lost her soul. Can it be astonishing that she no longer had feeling or recognition? Give her back her spirit and she will recover both. But how can she be so deceived who wept for you so bitterly and sought you with such ardor? Let us say that her mistake was excusable, or better that her ignorance did not proceed from error, but from sadness and the love which completely possessed her.

## V

O just and clement Judge, such ardent love, like the sorrow which filled her in your absence, served as an excuse for her in your eyes and made her obtain the pardon of her fault. Take no notice of her forgetfulness but look for its cause, and remember that it is love which deceived her and which obliged her to speak to you weeping: "Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him and I will take him away!" Oh, how enlightened is her ignorance and how full of knowledge her error! She said to the angels: "They have taken away my Lord." But she did not say: "It is you who have taken him." And in fact the angels did not draw you from the tomb and bring you to another place. She asked you only if you had taken him and placed him somewhere because you went forth by your own power from the tomb and placed yourself there where you are standing. She did not say to the angels: "Make known to me what happened in the tomb," because they could not tell completely what had gone on there. But speaking to you, she says: "Tell me" because it is not impossible for you to say what it is possible for you to do. But Lord, what do these words signify: "...where you have put him"? She says this to the apostles and to the angels, and she repeats them to you. Her heart must find sweet these words that she pronounces so often. In fact they recall to her the love that you

testified to her when you asked the Jews in speaking of her brother: "Where have you put him?" From that day they were kept in her heart as a cherished remembrance.

O how she loved your person who made so much of your words! O how she desired to see your face who repeated with so much joy what she had heard you say! O how happy she would be to kiss your feet! But what more does she add? "And I will take him away!" Joseph was afraid; he did not dare take your body from the cross except during the night and after having obtained permission from Pilate; but Magdalen did not seek the darkness, she did not fear Pilate's anger, she spoke courageously: "I will take him away." But, O Magdalen, if by chance the body of the Lord had been placed in the high priest's court, there where the prince of the apostles warmed himself for his consolation, what would you do? I would take it away! O marvelous courage of a woman! O woman whose strength is superior to that of the most valiant! And if the importune servant who kept the keys of the door of the high priest came to interrogate you, what would you answer? I will take him away! O ardent love, O incomparable strength! O woman not a woman! She respected no place, she excepted no one, but she protested absolutely without any fear: "Tell me where you have put him and I will take him away." O Woman, your faith is great and your constancy admirable.

Why then, Lord, did you not say: "Have confidence, your faith has saved you"? Have you then forgotten your mercies? Manifest your presence to her so that filled entirely with you she might go to announce your resurrection to your disciples! O Master, wait no longer to satisfy her desires. She has waited for you three days, she has had nothing to eat, nothing to quench the thirst of her soul. Is it not time that you make yourself known to her, that you give her the bread of your body, and that you nourish her spirit from your table? If then you do not wish her to remain languishing, give her the living bread which contains all kinds of delights. Life will not delay to leave her body if you do not manifest yourself to her soon, you who are the life of her soul.

Jesus said to her: "Mary!" She turned and replied: "Rabboni." And Jesus said: "Do not touch me." O change of the right hand of power! A great sorrow gives place to an extreme joy, and these tears of affliction are changed into tears of love. As soon as Magdalen had heard this name by which the Savior was accustomed to call her, she felt I know not what sweetness which made her recognize her Master. The Lord wished to continue to speak, but she had no patience to listen; she interrupted with joy and spoke to him: "Rabboni," and thinking that she had nothing else to say, since she had found him who is the eternal Word of the Father, she cast herself at his feet. O impatient and powerful love! It was not enough for her to see the Savior and to speak to him. She wished to touch him once more, knowing well that there went forth from him a virtue which would heal the whole world. O gentle and dear Master! How good you are to those who love you ardently and with humility of spirit! Blessed are those who seek you with a simple heart and place their confidence in you. We see this in the faithful Magdalen. She seeks for you with simplicity and finally she happily finds you. Her hope was in you alone, and you did not deceive her. But she had obtained more from your goodness than by her love, even though it was extreme.

## VI

Imitate then, O Christian souls, the affection of this woman in order to arrive at the graces which made her so blessed. Let each one of us weep for the death of the Savior, and look for him in the sincerity of our hearts; we will not be wanting in finding him, since he mani-

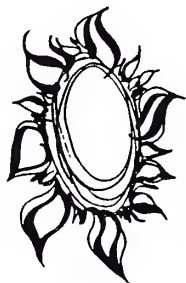


fested himself to a sinner. Sinful man, learn from her who had many sins pardoned, what you ought to do. Learn to regret the loss of God and to desire his presence. Learn from Magdalen to place in him your hope, and fear nothing in seeking him, but love him above all things, or rather scorn all things for love of him. Learn from Magdalen to seek Jesus in the tomb of your heart. Remove all hardness from your soul, symbolized by the rock which covered the tomb. Break to pieces all that is an obstacle to faith. Take from your heart all worldly concupiscence and carefully see if the Savior is in your soul. If you do not find him, stay there, desire and weep. Be constant in faith and look all around to see if you see him some place. Pray with tears that he may wish to enter and dwell with you. And for fear that your pride may chase him away, abase yourself in humility and bow down to look into the tomb which is your soul.

But if it happens that there you perceive angels, that is to say if you sense in you some good desires belonging to the contemplative or active life, which nevertheless are not yet capable of making you see and possess the Lord, do not be content with that, but seek him again. Weep and continue your search until you have found him. And if he responds to your desire and presents himself do not presume that you know him yet. Question him and beg him to manifest himself all the more to your soul. I dare to promise you that if you persevere in this way, if you weep and continue to look for him, if you humble yourself before him, and if like Magdalen, you are not content except with his presence, you will find him and he will reveal himself to you. It will not be enough for you to hear from him, but you will make him known to others while saying to them: "I have seen the Lord to whom be immortal glory." ▷◁

## ADVENT COMPLINE

*The drapes were down,  
"Gone to the cleaners," they said.  
The monstrance, glistening,  
its golden filigree piercing  
the dark, stretching out  
its rays: the Sun of Justice.  
Aloft, high in the wall  
between the choir —  
and the night.*



*Looking up, I looked  
out, seeing the stark  
darkness behind Christ,  
behind — or was it  
outside of His light.  
I bowed deeply and  
looking up again I saw  
Christ, His light, radiant,  
encompassing, filling up  
the emptiness of the black  
darkness of the night —  
The is-not became  
HE IS!*

Sr. Mary Catharine of Jesus, OP  
Summit, NJ  
December 16, 1999

# COMMENTARY ON THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE NUNS OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS

(Part III: Prayer; Hearing, Studying and Keeping the Word of God; Work)

Let us follow in the footsteps of Our Father Dominic

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*(This is the third installment of the Commentary by Sister Marie-Ancilla. Part I: Commentary on the Fundamental Constitution, appeared in **Dominican Monastic Search**, 1998; and Part II in 1999. Translation by Sr. Mary Thomas, O.P., Buffalo, NY.)*

## PART THREE CONTINUATION OF THE FIRST SECTION OF THE FIRST DISTINCTION: THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST

### CHAPTER II: PRAYER (LCM 74-95)

#### A: TEXT

*(The text of Constitutions 74-95, with its endnotes, has been omitted here.)*

#### B: COMMENTARY

#### INTRODUCTION: The Sources of Our Prayer (LCM 74)

The introduction of Chapter II places the emblem of Christ at the heart of our prayer, with the help of some quotations: Heb 5:7 (I), 1 Cor 4:16 (III), Augustine, *De sancta virg.*, 56 (IV). Christ who intercedes, Christ crucified, is before the eyes of the nuns, in their hearts, in their memories; here we are indeed at the heart of Dominican liturgy.

The remembrance of Christ, his imitation, will be translated into continual prayer (II). We are invited to the prayer of the heart. Three patristic themes are interwoven in this introduction: continual prayer (cf. LCM 89), the remembrance of God, and the imitation of Christ.

#### 1. The example of the prayer of Christ (I)

To pray is to enter into the great prayer of Christ preoccupied with the salvation of all people, interceding for them.

#### 2. St. Paul's exhortations to prayer (II)

Three texts of the Apostle present us with different aspects of our prayer: 1 Thes 5:17, Eph 5:19, and 1 Tim 2:1. These scriptural verses are not chosen at random; they have been used throughout Christian tradition. (1) We shall simply comment on each one.

1 Thes 5:17: Augustine comments on this in his Letter to Proba: "The word of the Apostle, 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thes 5:17), what does this mean if not: desire unceasingly the blessed life, which is nothing other than eternal life, from Him who alone can give it?" (16).

Eph 5:19: This is the verse Augustine uses when speaking of the prayer of monks in his *De opere monachorum*: "We devote ourselves to reading with the brothers who come to us, fatigued with worldly labors, to repose near us in the word of God and in prayers, 'psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles.'" (17)

1 Tim 2:1: Cassian "sees in the listing in the Letter to Timothy (1 Tim 2:1) the four degrees of prayer. If the exegesis is perhaps arguable, if the systematization risks artifice (IX, 9), Cassian himself recognizes that different forms of prayer may coexist and mingle in beginners as in the perfect, from compunction to the prayer of fire (IX, 15-16).

"This being said, prayer is first of all a plea for forgiveness and purity of heart. It is the cry of the sinner (IX, 11) and of the poor man, as the psalms tell us (X, 11). This corresponds to the fundamental purification which frees the soul and renders it light. Cassian compares it poetically to a light pen (IX, 4).

"The prayer-vow reveals the existential dimension of prayer. It goes hand in hand with renunciation of false values and the practice of chastity and patience (IX, 12).

"Intercession focuses the Christian and his work upon others (IX, 13). It progressively manifests the missionary dimension of prayer, which is also recalled in the commentary on the Our Father. The quotation from St. Paul shows that prayer opens out 'to all humanity' (IX, 17, 18, 20). Charity brings peace and purity.

"Thanksgiving, finally, is the contemplation of God's great gifts and a stretching toward fresh gifts which have been promised to us (IX, 14). Cassian breathes in the atmosphere of the dimension of the history of salvation, and causes the monk to do the same." (18)

### **3. The example of St. Dominic (III)**

St. Dominic was persevering in prayer, he celebrated the divine office with devotion, and his compassion impelled him to intercede for all men. Here we have the different aspects of prayer to which St. Paul exhorts us in the preceding paragraph. We should also note nocturnal prayer, so dear to St. Dominic.(19)

### **4. Our prayer (IV)**

To preserve "the perpetual remembrance of God" (20): this is indeed the ideal sought by monks from the beginning of the monastic life.(21) To remember God is a path to perpetual prayer. Is memory not "the faculty which makes durable and permanent what would otherwise escape us"? (22)

Everything in our life should be ordered to the growth of this perpetual remembrance of God, this union of mind and heart with Him: St. Basil had already said that everything is and ought to be a means of preserving the remembrance of God. This is particularly true of the Eucharist and the divine office, of reading and meditation on holy books, of private prayer, vigils, and intercessions.

But silence and "repose" (*quies*) should also contribute to this, that is, a life in which nothing is a hindrance to prayer, in which the heart is freed from all the "cares and anxieties" of the world.(23)



An Augustinian note is introduced in our Constitutions: this remembrance of God should be preserved *concorditer*. This echoes what Augustine says in the Rule when he speaks of one heart and soul intent upon God.

This remembrance of God is none other than the memory of Christ, the presence of Christ in the heart. We find again the theme of prayer of the heart and that of the imitation of Christ evoked in paragraph III. Our sentiments tend to become those of Christ himself (Phil 2:5). Now, St. Paul tells us, it is in the Incarnation and the Cross that Christ's deepest sentiments are best expressed.(24) This brings us to the conclusion of the paragraph which takes up again the counsel given by Augustine to consecrated virgins: "Let Him be wholly fixed in your heart, He who, for you, was fixed to the cross: let Him wholly occupy the place in your soul which you have not willed to give to a husband." (25)

Our hidden life, then, should be wholly oriented to seeking the face of God. Augustine too spent his entire life in this search: "Directing all my powers according to this rule of faith, as far as I could, as far as you have given me the ability, I have sought You, I have desired to see with my intellect the One whom I have believed, I have pondered this at length and I have prayed, Lord my God, my only hope. Grant that I may not give up seeking You through fear or lassitude, grant that I may ever 'SEEK YOUR FACE WITH ALL MY HEART' (Ps 104:4)." (26)

## I. ARTICLE I: THE LITURGY

### A. THEOLOGICAL ASPECT (LCM 75)

"The Liturgy of the Hours extends to the different hours of the day the praise and thanksgiving, the commemoration of the mysteries of salvation, the petitions and the foretaste of heavenly glory, that are present in the eucharistic mystery, 'the center and apex of the whole life of the Christian community.'" This n. 12 of the General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours (27), which presents the relation of the Liturgy of the Hours to the Eucharist, sums up nos. 75 and 76 of LCM: 1) the mystery of salvation present in the liturgy, 2) praise, thanksgiving and supplication, 3) the foretaste of heavenly glory, and 4) the Eucharist, center of the liturgy.

#### 1. The mystery of salvation present in the liturgy

***"In the liturgy, above all in the Eucharist, the mystery of salvation is made present"***

Here we have the teaching of the Council on the liturgy (28), which was admirably summarized in the General Constitution on the Liturgy of the Hours n. 13: "In the Holy Spirit Christ carries out through the Church 'the work of man's redemption and God's perfect glorification,' not only when the Eucharist is celebrated and the sacraments administered but also in other ways, and especially when the Liturgy of the Hours is celebrated. In it Christ himself is present, in the assembled community, in the proclamation of God's word, 'in the prayer and song of the Church.'" (29)

LCM stresses the eminent place held by the Eucharist by introducing in the text the antiphon composed by St. Thomas Aquinas for the Office of Corpus Christi (antiphon at the Magnificat of 2<sup>nd</sup> Vespers). In the parallel text of LCO (n. 57), the emphasis is placed on the mystery of salvation rendered present in the liturgy, which is the subject of the preaching of the

brethren. As this could not be used for the nuns, it was replaced with St. Thomas's antiphon. But this would have been better placed at the end of no. 76, for this Number treats particularly of the Eucharist, while n. 75 speaks of the liturgy in general.

## **2. Praise, thanksgiving, and intercession**

### ***"Deputed to divine praise"***

This is an addition of LCM to LCO, in direct connection with what the Church expects of monastic communities: *PC* n. 7 says of members of institutes wholly ordered to contemplation that they "offer God an eminent sacrifice of praise." These communities "represent in a special way the Church at prayer. They are a fuller sign of the Church as it continuously praises God with one voice, and they fulfill the duty of 'working,' above all by prayer, 'to build up and increase the whole mystical Body of Christ.' This is especially true of those who follow the contemplative life." (30)

We may wonder however if this deputing of the nuns to praise may not be understood as their being deputed to the divine office, a reflection of a conception of monastic life dating from the nineteenth century. The role of contemplatives in regard to God is, in fact, praise, but this sacrifice of praise is not uniquely nor even principally the divine office; it is the whole life of the nun. Only in the nineteenth century was the monastic life characterized by the divine office. (31).

### ***"In union with Christ"***

Praise and intercession are above all the work of Christ the priest (32) and through the liturgy the nuns participate in this priestly function of Christ.

### ***"The nuns ... glorify God for the eternal purpose of his will and the marvelous dispensation of grace."***

Two quotations from Ephesians are used here to speak of praise: Eph 1:5: "according to the purpose of his will"; and Eph 3:2: "the marvelous dispensation of the grace of God." The first motive for thanksgiving is the purpose of the Father's will, his gratuitous love for man; this is the source of all the gifts he has given us through his Son.

### ***"They intercede (interpellant) with the Father of mercies for the universal Church as well as for the needs and salvation of the whole world."***

Here we recall the *interpellandum* of Heb 7:25 and the *Pater misericordiarum* of 2 Cor 1:3. It is indeed a question of union with the great High priest, Christ, who intercedes without ceasing with his Father for all men. Here there is a refinement: the universal Church, the needs and salvation of the whole world. This was indeed the preoccupation of Dominic.

## **3. The foretaste of heavenly glory**

### ***"This joyful celebration joins the pilgrim Church to the Church in glory."***

This is a reference to Humbert of Romans (which is not found in LCO). Here is the text: "Joyful celebration, which melts hardness of heart, raises our earthbound spirits, chases away the sadness of this world, prepares us to receive the blessing of the Lord, drives the devil away in flight, makes the Church Militant like the Church Triumphant, and confounds her enemies!"(33)

The Church "militant" of Humbert's text has become in the Constitutions "the pilgrim Church" which recalls rather SC, n. 8.

Since it is praise, the liturgy is already an anticipation of the heavenly Jerusalem, where there will be nothing but praise: life in the Kingdom will be the singing of an eternal Alleluia.

#### **4. Liturgy, center of our life and root of its unity**

This affirmation has perhaps more force in LCO where the profound unity between liturgy and preaching has been shown. But for the nuns the celebration of the liturgy is also at the heart of their life and gives it its unity, for our contemplation is above all the contemplation of God's plan of salvation, and the apostolic dimension of our prayer and our whole life is only a prolongation of the great prayer of intercession of Christ, which is at the heart of the liturgy. Thus the liturgy gives its unity to our vocation as nuns in the Order of Preachers.

#### **5. The Eucharist, center of the liturgy (LCM 76)**

It is said in the *Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church*: "Pastors should make sure that the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is the center and summit of the whole life of the Christian community." (34) What is true of the entire Christian community is with all the more reason true of a monastic community.

The Eucharist is truly union with Christ and an entering into the very prayer of the risen Christ, in his offering to the Father in love, to unite all men to the Father through the gift of the Spirit. Here especially our fraternal charity and our apostolic spirit are rooted. What was said in the preceding Number regarding the liturgy in general is simply the unfolding of what takes place in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is called "the bond of charity," which recalls St. Augustine's exclamation, "O bond of charity" (35) which was quoted in the conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy to designate the memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord.(36) It is followed in this text by St. Thomas's antiphon which we have seen in n. 75.

The Eucharist is the first source of apostolic zeal. Is it not celebrated for the glory of God and the salvation of men? "The renewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them afire. From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a fountain, grace is channeled into us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their goal, are most powerfully achieved." (37)

### **B: PRACTICAL ASPECTS (LCM 79-88)**

#### **1. The obligation of the office (LCM 79)**

According to present canon law (38), religious are bound to the Liturgy of the Hours according to the determinations of the Constitutions and no longer according to the prescriptions of canon law. Our Constitutions maintain a double obligation: to the celebration of the entire office, and in choir.

Father Soullard sees in the fact that the obligation to the Office is no longer connected with canon law, a possibility of freedom of consciences. But there is perhaps an important practical consequence: dispensations from the Office regarding points which transcend the power of the prioress henceforth revert to the Master of the Order and not to the Congregation for Religious Life and Institutes of the Apostolic Life.



## 2. Dispensations from the Office

The paragraph concerning the private recitation of the Office has been suppressed. The Latin text of the present n. 80 does not speak of private recitation but of the above recitation, that is, that which was discussed in n. 79: "The nuns are bound to the daily celebration of the entire Liturgy of the Hours in choir." Father Soullard explains n. 80 in this way: "There is a double obligation; that of the entire Office and that of celebrating this Office in choir; hence the twofold possible dispensation, from choir or from the Office."

But the directories can give clarifications concerning private recitation, says Father Duval.

## 3. The Hours of the Office (LCM 81)

### a. The division of the Hours (I)

This paragraph gives the Council's teaching: "Because the purpose of the Office is to sanctify the day, the traditional sequence of the Hours is to be restored so that as far as possible they may once again be genuinely related to the time of the day at which they are prayed." (39)

### b. Characteristics of the different Hours (II-IV)

The plan is that of the Constitution on the Liturgy, but while paragraph II repeats SC n. 89 almost literally, in paragraphs III and IV emphasis is placed on the particularities of our Dominican tradition.

#### ***Lauds and Vespers (II)***

Cf. SC 89,a: "By the venerable tradition of the universal Church, Lauds as morning prayer and Vespers as evening prayer are the two hinges on which the daily Office turns; hence they are to be considered as the chief Hours and are to be celebrated as such."

#### ***Compline (III)***

We are reminded of the privileged place of Compline in the Order: "In the early days of the Order... the brethren attended Compline like a festival, recommending themselves to each other very affectionately. At the first sound of the bell, wherever they might be, they hastened to the choir." (40) This is how the *Lives of the Brethren* recorded the zeal of the first brethren. A very special mention is made of the *Salve Regina*. Humbert of Romans, commenting on the Dominican Constitutions, had already insisted on this custom, although it did not go back to the first Constitutions:

At the beginning of the Order, when our Constitutions were drawn up, this procession (in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary) was not made after Compline. But since a certain brother of Bologna had been attacked by the devil, the brethren decided, in order to obtain his deliverance, to sing the *Salve Regina* after Compline, and so it was done.... As to the procession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to which the brethren have great devotion, it was never interrupted. Master Jordan has recounted that a brother worthy of belief told him that he often saw the Blessed Virgin prostrating herself before her Son and beseeching Him to preserve the Order, at the moment when the brethren were singing, *Eia ergo advocata nostra*. (41)

The *Lives of the Brethren* report the institution of the singing of the *Salve* after Compline as follows:

The enemy of all good, the devil, who does not fear to attack the Master of the Universe, attacked the brethren from the beginning of the Order.... especially at Bologna and Paris, where the Preachers were combating him most vigorously.... Most of them had to undergo many vexations and blows, many illusions and phantasms. Things came to such a pass that at night the Brethren were obliged to take turns watching through the night over those who were resting.... They then had recourse to their only hope, the very powerful and merciful Mary, and decided that after Compline they would make a solemn procession in her honor while singing the anthem *Salve Regina* with its prayer. Soon the phantasms disappeared.(42)

#### ***The Office of Readings (IV)***

The Office of Readings is no longer said during the night by obligation, but mention is made of nocturnal prayer which is traditional in the Order. The example of St. Dominic who, following the example of the Savior (Lk 6:12), spent the night in prayer, cannot be forgotten. The first brethren have left many witnesses of this practice: "The blessed Father often spent the whole night in prayer to God; this was something affirmed frequently by the brethren." (43) "Father Dominic was often accustomed to spend the night in the church; he prayed there, and during his prayer shed abundant tears and often groaned." (44) The first brethren did the same: "In the early days... you would have seen all the brethren animated by a wonderful fervor... prolonging their prayers during the night until dawn, they would make a hundred or two hundred genuflections." (45) "After Matins, a few went to study; those who went back to bed were still fewer." (46)

#### **4. The chant (LCM 82)**

The Office is habitually sung, but it is counseled that account be taken of the degrees of the feasts, regarding the solemnity of the Offices. What should by its nature be sung should also be taken into account: the hymns, etc.

##### **a. Sobriety**

According to the earliest tradition of the Order, the Offices should be simple and brief. The primitive Constitutions had already prescribed: "All the Hours should be recited in the church in a brief and succinct way, lest the brethren lose devotion." (47)

Humbert of Romans sought the reason for this, and drew up a lengthy list of obstacles found in Offices which were too long:

We ought to consider carefully the hindrances resulting from the length of the Divine Office.

First of all the fact of leaving the choir. For many seek an occasion to withdraw, and ask permission to do this under the pretext of the length, in such a way that the choir is deserted.

Secondly, there is the fatigue of the brethren. Few there are who have sufficient courage and good health not to become exhausted from time to time by the length of the Office. As a result, those who ought to be in choir are obliged to stay in the infirmary.

Thirdly, there is spiritual repugnance. This afflicts almost everyone because of the long duration of the Office. This should absolutely be avoided during the time of praise and of the divine office. On the contrary, one should stand erect, with much joy. Jerome says: "I would rather sing one psalm with spiritual joy than the whole psalter in a state of torpor, disheartedly, and with distaste."

Fourthly, there is the disfigurement of the Office. For a long ceremony cannot be carried out with the same dignity and beauty as a short office. It is more praiseworthy to say a little and say it well than to say a great deal, badly, for we praise someone not for the quantity, but for the quality of his deeds. That is, more merit is gained by a good work than by a large work; we appreciate the craftsman who does what little he does, well, more than the one who produces a great deal of inferior things.

Fifthly, it is a hindrance to good works. Among these, two are eminently useful, and both of them are impeded by the length of the Office, namely, devotion and study, especially affected here.

On the subject of devotion, let us note that there is a devotion which is attached to the Office itself, and consists in saying it with devotion; another devotion is practiced by the brethren after the Office, when they spend some time in meditation or private prayer. These meditations and private prayers are called 'devotions' because on the one hand they proceed from devotion, that is from the free will and not from an obligation of the Order, and on the other hand because from them we often draw very holy sentiments.(48)

#### **b. Ordination 8**

This Ordination on Gregorian Chant requires ample reflection, especially the last sentence: "They should esteem Gregorian Chant which the Church recognizes as proper to the Roman liturgy." (49) We may wonder how the renewed Roman liturgy has been received, especially the Liturgy of the Hours which however presents us with a renewed liturgy, enriched by a return to the sources, particularly in regard to the hymns which are fittingly connected with Gregorian Chant.

The Roman liturgy ought perhaps to be viewed as a patrimony which enriches us spiritually, and for the transmission of which to following generations we are responsible.(50)

#### **5. Participation of the faithful in our celebrations (LCM 83)**

This is a new Number which repeats LCO 58. It is in the spirit of the Document *Mutuo relationes*.(51)

#### **6. The Sacrament of Reconciliation (LCM 84-85)**

The frequency which was fixed at twice a month is left free. The text only says "frequently" (LCM 84:I).

Furthermore, entire freedom should be allowed regarding confession (LCM 85; cf. Code of Canon Law, 630, I). According to Canon 630, III, a nun may ask for another confessor if the priests approved are not helpful to her.(52)

A communal celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is asked for (LCM 84:II) at least twice a year: this emphasizes its "fraternal, ecclesial dimension."(53) It is asked that these celebrations take place during Advent and Lent. This emphasizes the importance attached to the spirit of the liturgy. These two liturgical seasons are times of preparation, conversion. It is therefore normal that they be chosen for the communal sacramental celebration of penance.

#### **7. The Sacrament of the Sick (LCM 86) (54)**

As for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the communal dimension of the Sacrament of the sick is strongly emphasized. The whole community is involved. We should note the theme of Christ the Physician with its evangelical inspiration, so often developed by the Fathers.(55)



## II. ARTICLE II: PRIVATE PRAYER (LCM 89-95) (56)

### 1. The place of private prayer in our life (LCM 89)

Once more an insistence on continual prayer with, this time, the quotation from Lk 18:1, a text traditionally quoted in regard to continual prayer.(57) How to pray without ceasing was one of the great questions of primitive Christianity. And different answers have been proposed in the course of the centuries. One of the most original was that of St. Augustine: it is rooted in the depths of the human heart, in man's deepest desire:

Your desire is your prayer, and if your desire is continual, your prayer is continual. Not without reason did the Apostle say, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes 5:17).... There is an interior prayer which we cannot interrupt; it is desire. Regardless of what you may be doing, if you long for the eternal sabbath you are praying without ceasing. Your continual desire is also, for you, a continual word. You would be silent if you ceased to love. (58)

Desire is at the source of continual prayer because it is the expression of the heart's continual thrust toward God (LCM 89).

Concretely, Augustine counsels us, if we would pray continually, to pray several times a day and to do good works the rest of the time (59); the two spring from the same desire.

Our "private prayer," already mentioned by Humbert of Romans in his commentary on the Constitutions, recalls the Gospel text, "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (Mt 6:6). This phrase shows the very personal dimension our private prayer ought to have. (Let us note that it is not "meditation" [*oraison*] in LCM. This term evokes the context of the sixteenth century, which is something else.)

Here is Humbert of Romans's text:

This is the most important devotion to be engaged in, and if the brethren are beginning to fall away from private prayer, let them return to it with fervor and application. It is an obvious sign of holiness, and it would be difficult to find a person who is faithful to it lost, or even not making progress in the Order. The Savior has given us an example, for He prayed often, though He had no need of anything, so as to spur us on by his example. The Apostles left us an example when they abandoned serving at tables, as we read in Acts 6: 'Pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer....' Again, almost all the saints in the early days of the Church gave us an example of this, as their actions show clearly. Thus Paul the Hermit was found dead, leaning against a tree, his face and hands lifted to heaven as though in prayer. The blessed Dominic our Father left us a special example, very frequently spending whole nights in prayer, and having no bed of his own. Our first brethren left us an example, according to what the earliest witnesses in the Order tell us. Thus one of the brethren, rapt out of himself, so to say, through intense devotion, betook himself to Paris. One day he entered into our present church and found no brethren at prayer there. Remembering that the first church, a small one, was almost always full of brethren at prayer, in the place where he had stayed in the beginning, he asked what this present church was. When they told him that it belonged to the Friars Preachers, he said, "That is impossible! This is not the church of the Friars Preachers. For theirs is a small church, filled with praying brethren, prostrate before the altars on all sides. This is not like that." From this you can see that the brethren, in those days, gave themselves up to assiduous prayer.(60)

Father Bouchet comments: "The first brethren and the first Sisters were passionately devoted to prayer. When, under the influence of the monks of Cluny, stress was put above all on the liturgy, the brethren for their part followed another tradition which insisted strongly on personal dialog with the Lord as the foundation of their life. This means that the liturgy will only have its full import if we truly have moments of rootedness in the Lord, personal and profound."

A little further on, Humbert of Romans says that we are deputed to private prayer by divine obligation and to the Divine Office by ecclesiastical obligation.(61) This means that by our vocation the Lord calls us to a life of prayer, and the Church then determines the modalities of our prayer.

## **2. Devotions dear to the Order (LCM 90-93)**

### **a. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (LCM 90)**

The adoration of Christ in the Eucharist is described as an admirable exchange: a patristic expression found in the liturgy of January 1, which is applied to the Incarnation. "O wonderful exchange! The Creator of human nature took on a human body and was born of the Virgin. He became man without having a human father and has bestowed on us his divine nature" (1<sup>st</sup> Antiphon of 1<sup>st</sup> Vespers).

It is indeed a similar exchange which is wrought in the adoration of the Body of Christ. Our eyes of flesh look on the Eucharistic Body of Christ. In exchange, the Word purifies the eyes of our hearts, so that we may see him more clearly through loving faith, and that thus our desire to see him one day face to face may grow. Hence the progress in the theological virtues favored by Eucharistic adoration.

This is a dimension of the Eucharist familiar to the Fathers of the Church. "Sanctify your eyes by contact with the sacred Body," said St. Cyril of Jerusalem.(62)

### **b. Marian prayer (LCM 91)**

#### ***Marian devotion in the Order (I)***

Veneration for the Virgin Mary has held a very important place in the Order from its beginnings. It suffices to read the *Lives of the Brethren* to see this.

Our Constitutions present the Blessed Virgin Mary to us as the Mother of Mercy (*Mater misericordiae* of the *Salve Regina*), the manifestation of God's mercy. She is also Queen of Apostles and of Virgins, two expressions found in her litany. Again, she is our model for meditation on the words of Christ (Lk 2:19-51), which ought to stimulate us to meditate unceasingly on the Word. A model of docility to her own mission (Lk 1:38), she is for us an example of fidelity to our vocation.

#### ***Recitation of the Rosary (II)***

The Constitutions only prescribe the common recitation. It is intentional that this number does not speak of private recitation (Father Duval). This is different from LCO.

### **c. Devotion to the saints of our Order (LCM 92)**

Regarding devotion to St Dominic, the circular letter of Father Vayssi re remains one of the richest texts ever written (April 21, 1935).

As to the Dominican saints, there is perhaps much still to be discovered: St. Thomas, the Rhineland mystics, St. Catherine of Siena, as well as all the saints and blessed whose names are not known.(63)

We might wonder whether interest in the mystics of Carmel has not taken away from a knowledge of those of our Order?

As for St. Dominic, perhaps the historic approach is too much stressed, to the detriment of a spiritual reading of sources?

#### **d. Length of time for private prayer (LCM 93)**

In light of the attachment of our tradition to private prayer, a sufficient amount of time is to be understood: two hours a day should be devoted to it. The liturgy is not the whole of our prayer life. It is necessary therefore to take care to preserve a balance between liturgy and private prayer.

#### **e. Annual retreats (LCM 94)**

The expression "retreat" goes back no further than the sixteenth century. An annual retreat is designated. "Traditionally," notes J. Leclercq, "a retreat was only one of the exercises included in the overall spiritual life,.... And was designated by *recessus* and *secessus* (*withdrawal* and *by oneself*)." (64) Cf. Code, c. 719: *recessus*).

### **ABBREVIATIONS**

CIC	= Code of Canon Law
DV	= <i>Dei Verbum</i>
LCM	= Constitutions of the Dominican Nuns
LCO	= Constitutions of the Dominican Friars
PC	= <i>Perfectae Caritatis</i>
SC	= <i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)
VS	= <i>Venite Seorsum</i>

### **NOTES FOR CHAPTER II**

1. (Ed. note: There was a reference at this point to three footnotes the author adds to the text of LCM. 74:II. I include them here). 1 Thes 5:17 is quoted in Origen, *De oratione*, 12; Augustine, *Epist.*, 130, 18; Cassian, *Coll.*, IX, 3,6,7; St. Thomas, *ST.*, IIa, IIae, q. 83, a. 14, sed contra. Implied quotation from Eph 5:19 in *Rule of St. Augustine*, II, 3. 1Tim 2:1 is quoted in Origen, *De oratione*, 14; Cassian, *Coll.*, IX, 11 (Cassian depends on Origen); cited in St. Thomas, *op. cit.*, IIa, IIae, q. 83, a. 17, corpus and sed contra.

(Remaining note numbers through 15 pertained to the omitted texts of LCM.)

16. Augustine, *Epist.*, 130, 18.
17. Augustine, *De op. Monach.*, 2.
18. A.-G. Hamman, "Jean Cassien, Conférences, Livres IX et X," *Connaissance des Pères de l'Église*, n. 12 (Dec. 1983), p. 15.
19. Cf. M.-H. Vicaire, "La recherche incessante de Dieu," in *Dominique et ses Prêcheurs*, ed. Universitaires Fribourg Suisse (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1977), pp. 158-160.
20. Cassian, *Coll.*, X, 10.



21. Cf. "Souvenir de Dieu" in I. Hausherr, *Noms du Christ et voies d'oraison*, "Ad perpetuam Dei memoriam," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 157 (Rome, 1960), pp. 156-162.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
23. Cassian, *Coll.*, X, 10; cf. LCM 1:III.
24. Cf. I. Hausherr, "The Imitation of Christ in Byzantine Spirituality," in *Etudes de la spiritualité orientale*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 183 (Rome, 1969), p. 242.
25. Augustine, *De sancta virg.*, 56.
26. *Ibid.*, *De Trin.*, XV, 28, 51.
27. *The Liturgy of the Hours*, vol 1 (New York: Catholic Book Publ. Co., 1975), p. 29.
28. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 5, 6, 83. *The Documents of Vatican II*, Abbot-Gallagher ed. (New York: Guild Press, 1966), p. 139ff.
29. *The Liturgy of the Hours*, *ibid.*
30. *Ibid.* p. 35.
31. Cf. J. Leclercq, "La vie contemplative et le monachisme d'après Vatican II," *Gregorianum*, 47 (1966), p. 506, note 19.
32. Cf. SC 83.
33. Bl. Humbert of Romans, *Expositio super constitutiones Fratrum Praedicatorum*, XXVI, in *Opera de vita regulari*, v. II, pp. 84-85.
34. *Christus Dominus*, 30.
35. Augustine, *Tract. In Io. Ev.* 26, 13; for the meaning of this expression, cf. B.A. 72, pp. 814-815.
36. SC 47.
37. *Ibid.*, 10.
38. CIC, c. 1174, 1.
39. SC 88.
40. *Vitae fratrum*, IV, 1.
41. Bl. Humbert, *op. cit.*, note 31, p. 131.
42. *Vitae fratrum*, VII, 1, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.
43. *Process of canonization*, Bologna, 20.
44. *Ibid.*, 31.
45. *Vitae fratrum*, IV, 1.
46. *Ibid.*, two pages further on.
47. For a commentary on "breviter et succincte" cf. A. Duval, "La liturgie dans la fonction de l'Ordre des Prêcheurs", *Provincialia* 7, pp. 40-41.
48. *Primitive constitutions*, dist. I, ch. 4. Bl. Humbert, *op. cit.*, note 31, ch. XXVII, pp. 85-86.
49. SL 116.
50. The sources of the *Liturgy of the Hours* make us aware of the rootedness of the Roman liturgy in tradition, especially of the influence of the Fathers of the Church. For the sources of the hymns, cf. *Te decet hymnus. L'innario della "Liturgia Horarum" a cura de Anselmo Lentini* (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1984). Abridged indications are given in: *Les hymnes de liturgia Horarum* (Paris: Desclée-Mame, 1990).
51. In connection with the liturgy as "the action of the People of God," J. Corbon explains: "Etymologically [liturgy signifies] 'public service', according to the interpretation generally understood by Greek scholars. Once passed into Christian language the word goes beyond the original meaning. Yet we always find in it the aspect of service or of a function performed by a group; from this we get the widely used interpretation today of 'the action of the people of God' but this action

is to be understood of the great work of Christ's Passover, which becomes that of the Church in her mission. If, in the liturgy, the people of God become rather the Body of Christ, their action, their divine work will be to do that which Christ does all the more, being all in all." (J. Corbon, *Liturgie de source* (Paris: Cerf, 1980), p. 57, note 1; p. 199). (ET: Available in English translation as: *The Wellspring of Worship* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

52. *Directoire canonique, vie consacrée et sociétés de vie apostolique* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), p. 115.
53. "Dimension contemplative de la vie religieuse," II, B, Document of CIVCSVA (1980).
54. *Op. cit.*, note 449, p. 119.
55. Cf. G. Dumeige, Article "Médecin (Le Christ)", *DS*, v. LXVI-LXVII, col.891-901.
56. R.P. Lemonyer, "Les prières secrètes dans la vie dominicaine," *Année dominicaine*, n. 6 (1927), pp. 269-276.
57. Lk 18, 1 is quoted in Origen, *De oratione*, 10; Augustine, *Epist.* 130, 15; St. Thomas, *ST II-II*, q. 83, a. 2, sed contra.
58. Augustine, *En. In Ps.* 373, 14; cf. I. Hausherr, *op. cit.*, note 21, pp.129-141.
59. I. Hausherr, *op. cit.*, note 24, p. 140.
60. Bl. Humbert, *op. cit.*, note 11, XXXI, pp. 91-92; cf. *op. cit.*, note 15, LIII, p. 172.
61. Bl. Humbert, *op. cit.*, note 15, LIII, p. 173.
62. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Myst.*, V, 21.
63. H.-C. Chéry O.P., *Saints et bienheureux de la famille dominicaine*; Fraternité dominicaine Lacordaire, 104, rue Bugeaud, 69451 Lyon cedex 06, 1991.
64. J. Leclercq, "La retraite", *Chances de la spiritualité occidentale*, (Paris: Cerf, 1966), pp. 329-337.

### CHAPTER III: HEARING, STUDYING AND KEEPING THE WORD OF GOD (LCM 96-102) (cf. Lk. 11:28)

#### A. TEXT

*(The text of Constitutions 96-102, with its endnotes, has been omitted here.)*

#### B. COMMENTARY

Like the chapter on prayer, the chapter on study begins with several numbers proper to LCM which serve to situate the nuns in their own vocation within the Order.\* But the title itself deserves a comment: it recalls the beatitude of those who hear the Word of God and keep it. Now this verse of St. Luke (11:28) is at the heart of the paragraph of the *Libellus* where Jordan of Saxony explains the way in which Dominic approached Scripture. Here is the text:

Afterwards he was sent to Palencia to be formed in the liberal arts, because there was a thriving arts faculty there at this time. When he thought he had learned enough of the arts, he abandoned them and fled to the study of theology, as if he was afraid to waste

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\* Ed. Note: The author places an extensive note on the first sentence of LCM 96:I regarding the vocation and commission of the brethren to preaching. Rather than omit it along with the text of the Constitutions, I have retained it at the end of this Chapter as Note 1, where it was in the unabridged text.

his limited time on less fruitful study. He began to develop a passionate appetite for God's words, finding them "sweeter than honey to his mouth."

He spent four years in these sacred studies, and throughout the whole period his eagerness to imbibe the streams of holy scripture was so intense and so unrelenting that he spent whole nights almost without sleep, so untiring was his desire to study; and the truth which his ears received he stored away in the deepest recesses of his mind and guarded in his retentive memory. His natural abilities made it easy for him to take things in, and his love and piety fertilized whatever he learned, so that it brought forth fruit in the form of saving works. The verdict of Truth himself pronounces him blessed: as he said in the gospel, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." There are two ways of keeping the word of God: one is to retain the word in our memories, once we have heard it, the other is to put it into practice and display it in action. There is no doubt that the second way is better, just as it is better to keep seed by planting it in the earth than by hoarding it in a box. Now this fortunate servant of God, Dominic, was adept at keeping God's word in both ways: his memory was a kind of "barn" for God "filled to overflowing with crops of every kind," and his external behavior and actions broadcast publicly the treasure that lay hidden in his holy breast.

Because he accepted the Lord's commandments so warmly, and because his will welcomed the voice of his Lover with such loyalty and pleasure, the God of all knowledge gave him an increase of grace, so that he became capable of receiving more than the milk of beginners, and was able to penetrate the mysteries of difficult theological questions with the humble understanding of his heart, and to swallow easily enough the testing promotion to more solid food.(7)

Dominic had reached the beatitude proclaimed by the Lord: "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:28; cf. LCM 96:1). (Let us note that Truth Himself proclaimed this beatitude).

To attain to this happiness, Dominic had integrated in his life the parable of the seed cast into good earth, which bore fruit a hundredfold (cf. Mt 13:18-23 referred to in LCM 99). How did he do this?

Truth is first heard: it is received by the ear. Then it is retained deeper in the soul through the memory. This is to place the seed in the granary (evoking Psalm 143 remotely). But that is not all: "to keep the word" implies also casting the grain of wheat into the earth and watering it so that it may come up. The rain which causes it to germinate is piety, that is, humble submission to the Word of God. "Filial piety urges us to conform ourselves to the will of God revealed in His Word." This is the point of departure for the pilgrimage toward the wisdom that is truth and charity. This piety is a gift of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11) which, according to St. Augustine, is associated with the beatitude of the meek, those who are docile to the Word.

Thus, watering the seed with piety led Dominic naturally to bear visible fruits in his external actions. The famine which struck Palencia was a striking sign of this. Jordan of Saxony emphasizes the fact that his action was a form of obedience to the Word of God:

While he was a student at Palencia, there was a severe famine throughout almost the whole of Spain. He was deeply moved by the plight of the poor, and resolved, in the warmth of his compassion, to do something which would both accord with the Lord's counsels and do as much as possible to remedy the needs of the poor who were dying. So he sold the books which he possessed, although he needed them very much, and established an almonry where the poor could be fed. In this way "open-handed he gave



to the poor.” His exemplary kindness so moved some of the other theologians and masters that they too began to give more lavish alms, seeing their own sluggish parsimony shown up by the young man’s generosity.(8)

The Word of God which had been sown “in the sanctuary of Dominic’s heart” now radiated outwardly. He had put it into practice.

The context is mystical. Dominic “embraced” the laws of the Lord; “he opened to the voice of the Spouse”: Scripture is shown to be his lifelong companion. It was not simply a text, but the very Word of God. Christ Himself spoke to his heart to lead him to a high degree of union with Him – as is suggested by the term Spouse – a union which transformed his whole life.

This loving welcome to the Word led to God’s giving him a still higher grace. Dominic passed from milk to solid food. God granted him to understand the secrets of Scripture.

Dominic’s reading of Scripture seems to have been in the tradition of the Fathers of the Church. The title of the chapter, in evoking Dominic at Palencia, is in perfect harmony with the numbers to follow.

We may wonder, all the same, at the close of this commentary, why, in the title, “study” was added to hearing and keeping the Word; since for Dominic, hearing and keeping the Word included study. It is in order to speak of the study of theology which Dominic did at Palencia – which was nothing else than the study of the Word of God – that Jordan uses the beatitude of Luke. But perhaps we have lost the sense of this “real” reading of the Word of God, as Father Pinckaers calls it. Real, because it passes into our living, and real because it attains to the core of the mysteries contained in Scripture.

## **1. The service of the Word proper to the nuns (LCM 96)**

### **a. The proclamation of the Word (96:I)**

This is a kind of adaptation to the nuns of Chapter IV of Section I of LCO on “The Ministry of the Word.” The brethren serve the Word primarily by preaching (and by giving an example of it: cf. LCO, Fundamental Constitution 5); the Sisters solely by hearing it, celebrating it, keeping it, and also by their example. In both cases, under different modalities, it is a matter of proclaiming the Gospel. The nuns thus exercise “a ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:2-4). (Cf. VS, V.)

To give an example was a characteristic attitude of Dominic, even at Palencia (9), but also when his entire life was devoted to preaching the Word:

“He showed himself to be everywhere a man of the Gospel, in word and action.” (10)

“The first head of the Preachers had it much at heart to show himself as an irreproachable worker, and to speak the word of truth fittingly. And as all beautiful words lose their value if the one who utters them has faults, he was careful to practice first what he was trying to teach others.” (11)

### **b. The Word at the heart of our life (96:II)**

This paragraph recalls 35:II on observance and gives us its purpose: that the Word of God may dwell in our communities. The more care we take to abide in the Word as our own dwelling (Jn 8:31), the more the Word will abide with us and dwell in us (Col 3:16).

The role of the nuns thus has something in common with the ministry of John the Baptist: by their life of prayer and penance wholly directed to welcoming the Word, they prepare the way of the Word.(12) Father Bouchet wanted to introduce a mention of John the Baptist, the Precursor of Christ, here. He is, actually, the great patron of the monastic desert, one of the great models for the desert Fathers. Moreover, he still remains a great figure for all later monastic tradition.

## **I. ARTICLE I: *LECTIO DIVINA* (LCM 97-99)**

### **1. *Lectio divina* and prayer (LCM 97)**

#### **a. A reading done with the heart (I)**

*Lectio divina* is not just any kind of reading of the Word: "it is a loving knowledge of the Word" which, read in a climate of truth and humility, is accompanied by prayer and leads to prayer.(13)

The quotation from St. Ambrose (cited already in DV 25 and taken up in VS II) which is given, sums up well the way in which the Fathers conceived of the approach to the Word.(14)

#### **b. *Lectio divina* or an encounter with Christ (II)**

For the Fathers of the Church the Word of God was not a text; it was a Person, Christ. He is the one we hear in the Scriptures:

"Read all the books of the Prophets," says St. Augustine, "and if you do not find Christ there, what could be more tasteless and senseless? Find Christ there, and your reading will not only be filled with savor, but it will inebriate you, lifting your spirit above the body in such a way that, forgetting the past, you will stretch forward to what lies ahead." (This was the advance made by the disciples of Emmaus): "They recognized Christ in those books where they had never seen Him before.... The Scriptures have no savor if we do not discover Christ in them."(15)

Augustine tells us again that every passage of Scripture "rings out the sound of Christ." (16) This quotation is taken up in our Constitutions.

But if Scripture is the privileged place of encounter with Christ, it is not the only one. The Church is the sacrament of Christ: all the riches it transmits to us give us Christ, whether it be through the sacraments, preaching, or the example of the saints. In the same way, all thirst for charity in the world is a call of Christ.

But to discover Christ in all this, to hear His word in it, the ears of our hearts (17) must be attuned to the interior Master who speaks within us through his Spirit.(18)

### **2. St. Dominic and Scripture (LCM 98:I)**

As in many other chapters, the example of St. Dominic is proposed to us. Here we are reminded of his love of the Word which led him to carry with him at all times the Gospel of Matthew and the Letters of St. Paul. The Church expects of us this same love of the Word. *Perfectae Caritatis* expresses this desire for all religious: "Let the Sacred Scriptures be in their hands daily." (19)

This reading of the Word is the first step on the road to contemplation (20), as St. Dominic's eighth way of prayer shows us.

The first stage is *lectio*: "You...opened my ear," says Psalm 40:6. This is indeed the first and indispensable attitude for all true hearing of the Word. It is a matter of listening in obedience and humility.

Then comes *oratio*: this means to pray, to knock at the door, to beg the Lord that we may be given understanding of the word.

In *meditatio*, then, Scripture is pondered, explored, devoured. The rock that is Christ appears; charity is discovered in every word of the sacred Books.

*Contemplatio*, finally, is communion with Christ, with the Word Himself; it enters into the mystery of God, a foretaste of the blessedness which God causes us to attain through Scripture.

### 3. Liturgy and the Word of God (LCM 98:II)

In *lectio divina* the word of God is heard. In the liturgy it is also celebrated. There is a liturgy, the celebration of the Word, because in the Spirit the words of Jesus are more than a teaching, they become an event: what is said is fulfilled. The Word given by the Father in Christ returns to the Father in the liturgy, becoming fruitful in all His adopted children: it leads to communion.(21)

In the celebration of the Word we encounter the Word of life in the silence of faith, and he causes us to be born to his life. With him, then, we give thanks to the Father in the Spirit. This praise is expressed in the liturgy in the same words in which God revealed to us his plan of love. God has given us his words with which to praise him: "In order that He might be fittingly praised by men, God praises Himself." (22)

Particularly in the Psalms, the entire economy of salvation becomes prayer; this is why they are at the heart of the liturgy. Through the Psalms, which were the prayer of Christ on earth, the praise of the Son is reflected in the children of adoption.(23)

### 4. Welcoming the Word (LCM 99)

We are invited to meditate on the parable of the seed thrown into the ground of our hearts (Mt 13:18-23). In order that it may find a place, and dwell there, we must take care to turn our hearts away from all that could impede it. The Holy Spirit can then cause the Word which converts to grow:

"Change your hearts, for you can do it," says St. Augustine. "Plough up the soil which has been trodden down by passers-by; throw the stones out of the field, pull up the thistles; do not have a hard heart where the Word of God cannot penetrate. Let not your soul be shallow earth where charity cannot take root; do not let cares and pleasures smother the good seed." (24)

To explain this conversion effected by the Word, another parable is proposed to us: that of the man who is invited to settle his accounts with his adversary while he is still on the way with him (Mt 5:25). Our life should "accord with Sacred Scripture" (*consentit Scripturae divinae*), St. Augustine tells us. But why identify Scripture with our adversary on the way?

What adversary could be more inimical to those who want to sin than the commandment of God, that is, His law and the sacred Scripture which has been given to us to accompany us, to direct us on the way of life, which we should never contradict if we do not want it to deliver us into the hands of the judge, and with which we should hasten to come to an agreement? (*sed ei oportet consentire cito?*) For no one knows when he will depart this life. Now who is it that comes to agreement with sacred Scripture, if not the



one who reads or hears it with devotion, who recognizes its sovereign authority, who does not hold what he understands of it in contempt, because he finds there the condemnation of his sins, but who receives lovingly that which calls him to his duty, and rejoices that his maladies are not spared, so that they may be healed. If he thinks that at times he comes upon parts that are obscure or untrue, he does not make it a matter of contradictory argument, but prays for understanding, and never forgets the loving reverence he owes to so great an authority. Now who is able to act in this way, if not the one who approaches without bitterness or threat, but with a sweetness full of devotion, to open the testament of his father and learn of it? "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth" (Mt 5:4).(25)

To be in accord with the Word is to live the beatitude of the meek, and to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Our life, in accord with the Word, will be totally transformed, configured to Christ. It will breathe forth, as the *Rule* says, the good odor of Christ.

The whole ideal proposed in the Fundamental Constitution – conversion, transfiguration, etc. – appears here to be the result of the Holy Spirit's work in us, particularly thanks to the Word.

The work of the Holy Spirit in us is described with the help of the word *reformare*.(26) This word has a very precise meaning for Augustine. It designates the *reformatio* of the image which had become *deformis* by sin. This *reformatio* is the effect of a reciprocal relationship between God and man. This is why when we are in accord with the Word of God, when we are listening to it, when it dwells in our hearts through charity, when it causes the love of our hearts to be directed toward things above, then *reformatio* progresses. This *reformatio* is also a *renovatio*, since it changes the old person into the new person who lives by the new commandment. The *reformatio* to which assimilation of the Word contributes, leads therefore to a configuration to Christ. (27)

## II. ARTICLE II: STUDY (LCM 100-102)

This article is new, even though most of its elements are taken from previous Constitutions. It should be studied as parallel to Chapter III of LCO.

I should like to emphasize once more that all the modifications made in the 1971 text correspond to the *desiderata* of the mixed commission charged with the revision of the Constitutions.

### 1. Importance of study (LCM 100) (28)

#### a. Purpose of study (I)

This paragraph differs from its LCO parallel, 76 and 77. For the brethren study is primarily "ordered to the ministry of salvation"; for us, it is a preparation for *lectio divina* and to a deeper entrance into the liturgy. This is the source of the divergences we will encounter between LCO and LCM in regard to study. This is very important, for in a monastery one does not study just anything at all. Father Bouchet said in a retreat:

You should not study just anything, and take ideas for reality. Study should be realistic, it comes from faith and leads to faith. Your intellectual work should always be in the tradition of the delectable experience of God. This is important because the Sisters do not have the same guidelines regarding study as the brethren, who often study in view of their apostolic life and the service of the Church which is asked of them. To study anything at all is a way of breaking enclosure. The Sisters should never forget that monastic theology is a theology of love, built on the revelation of God-Love and on that expression of the love of God which is the community. It is God-Love who configures us together in His image, and through this a deepening of heart should be attained little by little. In monastic theology, the theology of the Holy Spirit, Trinitarian theology, the theology of the Church, all harmonize around the perception that God is Love. Study, therefore, is at the service of our common goal: to live by love, in the service of God-Love. It becomes a form of praise, of thanksgiving, a hearth of our experience of God.

The theology of St. Augustine is a model of this theology of love.

Thus study concerns all the Sisters, but should be adapted to the aptitudes of each one; it is not possible to have a standard level of study in a monastery (even if this fact does pose some practical problems).

#### **b. The role of study in our life (II)**

This paragraph develops LCO 83.

As for the brethren, study is for the Sisters an important element of Dominican observance. The text then emphasizes that St. Dominic had already recommended it "in some way" to the first Sisters. They, in fact, devoted themselves to the *eruditio litterarum* [the study of letters]. The study of Scripture (29) therefore had its place in the life of the Sisters of St. Sixtus (cf. the text cited in 103:III of LCM).

In addition to the benefits conferred by study on contemplation and the practice of the evangelical counsels (cf. LCO 83), it is said for the nuns that study "removes the impediments which arise from ignorance."

Who has not heard of the grave errors into which the monks of the desert fell because of their ignorance? "Obsession and terror of demons, belief in a girl changed into a mare, the belief that God the Father had a human body and sentiments, crassness or ignorance in which so many Eastern monasteries stagnated, incurable laziness in which so many 'religious' vegetated" (30): this is the picture of the evil effects of ignorance in monasteries drawn by Father Festugière. We could perhaps think of the many forms this could take on today.... As far as laziness goes, the transposition is quickly made!

Mutual understanding and community reflection would certainly gain if there were a foundation of deeper study, for many tensions come from ignorance.

As our paragraph rightly emphasizes, study contributes to unanimity of spirit. How can we reach a consensus, without first having learned how to think clearly? – which is one of the benefits of study; without learning how to enter into the thought of another? – again, a benefit of study. Study is a good apprenticeship in listening, for it requires an attitude of poverty to be able to hear what is being said in the text under study, without wanting to hold forth ourselves instead.

But LCO and LCM stress that all this is not done without difficulty. Thus, study develops perseverance and demands a great asceticism (this is new, as compared with the 1971 text). LCM also mentions the advantage of study at the level of balance.

## **2. The content of study (LCM 101)**

### **a. The source of study (I)**

Two biblical citations, Heb 1:1-2 and Eph 1:9, structure this paragraph, which is reminiscent of *Dei Verbum* 4 and 2.

Christ, the fullness of revelation, has revealed in his Church through the gift of his Spirit the mystery of the will of the Father; and through his light he grants men and women to ponder it. Study is nothing else than that.

### **b. What are we formed to? (II) (31)**

The mystery of the will of the Father is revealed to us above all in Scripture and the sacraments. Hence the logical conclusion: the formation of the Sisters focuses primarily on these two points.

### **c. How are we formed (III) (32)**

Study, as we have just seen, having for its goal the nourishment of our faith, should find its support in the great witnesses to the faith who have deepened it in the Church: the Fathers of the Church and the theologians, among whom St. Thomas is outstanding. Moreover, St. Thomas would gain by being read in light of the Fathers, since he is a doctor who had a particular understanding of their teaching and deepened and enriched it. In all this, too, only one thing is to be sought: to grow in understanding of Scripture. Let us note that the Sisters should study especially their mystical teaching.

## **3. The development of study (LCM 102, Ordinations 9, 10) (33)**

Two points have been added to the 1971 Constitutions:

- 102:I: "the prioress should see to it...that discussions among the nuns are provided for" (an approach to LCM 6:II).
- 102:III: "a sufficient sum of money [should be] allocated for library development each year."

Ordination 10 adapts for the monasteries the function of conventual lector of studies which is in place for the brethren. Perhaps this possibility should be exploited, to give study the place it deserves in our communities, at both personal and communal levels? The prioress could have assistance for the needed arrangements. Why should study be marginalized?

## **NOTES TO CHAPTER III**

1. Honorius III, bull of Feb. 4, 1221, addressed to all the prelates of the Church. This text is cited in LCO, Fundamental Constitution 3. Here is Father Vicaire's commentary on it:

"This sentence, which expresses so strongly the specificity of the Order, is borrowed from the chief bull of recommendation, granted by Honorius III on February 4, 1221. The *totaliter deputati* carries great weight.

"For Dominic it was indubitable that the Order was committed to an adequate deputation of brothers to preaching, administered by superiors under the control of their prudence alone. Thus, he did not hesitate to send a brother out to preach who had just finished his theology course, even



a novice. He did not recognize a bishop's right to forbid this preaching, nor to give him [Dominic] a power he already possessed. It was only later, in the course of the thirteenth century, in the face of the reaction of the secular clergy, that a system of jurisdiction was elaborated which was often modified in the event, and is still in vigor today. Not that Dominic had any doubt about the need of jurisdiction: he believed he had already obtained this for each of the brethren through the confirmation he had gone to petition from the Holy See in 1215, and had obtained 'fully and in regard to all matters' from Pope Honorius III: 'the confirmation of an Order which was called, and actually was, the Order of Preachers.'

"At this time, Popes Innocent III and Honorius III ruled that the right to preach in the name of Christ depended essentially on the formal 'mission' of the Church, according to the words 'how shall they preach unless they are sent?' However, in the preceding century monks and canons had fought to base the right to preach primarily on their manner of life, the 'apostolic life' or the regular common life. While the Waldensians whom Dominic met in Languedoc wanted to base their right to preach on their interior mission given them by the Spirit, the issue of their charism or 'grace of preaching' exercised in mendicant poverty, Dominic, in full accord with the papacy, based his brethren's right to preach on the mission or 'total deputation' conferred upon the Preachers through the confirmation of the Church. But he made regular life and mendicant poverty (and many other things besides 'the grace of preaching') the specific conditions of his brethren's preaching." Cf. M.-H. Vicaire, "La constitution fondamentale des Frères Prêcheurs," *La vie dominicaine de Fribourg*, No. 4, July-August (1973), pp. 297-298.

(Remaining note numbers through 6 pertained to the omitted texts of LCM.)

7. Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus*, 6-7.

8. *Ibid.*, 10.

9. Cf. Note 8.

10. Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus*, 104.

11. Theodoric of Apolda, n. 193, in the *Book on the life and death of St. Dominic*, translated by the Abbé A. Curé (Paris: International Catholic Library of the Works of St. Paul, 1887).

12. Cf. Augustine, S., 289, 3; 293, 3.

13. Cf. J.-R. Bouchet and "Women nourished by the Word," Diskette 80002.

14. Cf. Augustine: "When you read, God speaks to you; when you pray, you speak with God" (*En. In Ps.* 85, 7).

15. *Ibid.*, *Tract. In Io. Ev.*, 9, 3-5.

16. *Ibid.*, *Tract. In Io. Epist.*, 2, 1.

17. *Ibid.*, S., 17, 1.

18. "Here is a great mystery to ponder: the sound of our words strikes upon your ears, the Master is within. Do not think that anything is learned from another man. We can catch your attention with the sound of our voice; but if the One who instructs is not within, the clamor of our words is in vain. Do you want proof of this, brothers? Haven't you all heard this homily? How many will go away having learned nothing? As far as it depends on me, I have spoken to all of you; but those to whom my words do not speak interiorly, those whom the Holy Spirit has not instructed from within, will go away without having learned anything. External teaching is an aid, an invitation to pay attention. But the chair of the one who teaches hearts is in heaven. That is why He himself says in the Gospel: 'Call no one on earth your teacher; Christ alone is your Teacher.' Let Him speak, then, within, there where no man can penetrate; for even if someone is beside you, no one is in your heart. But no! Let it not happen that there is no one in your heart; let Christ be in your heart; let His unction be in your heart, so that your heart may not dry up in the desert, without springs to water it. It is the interior Master, therefore, who instructs you, it is Christ who teaches you, it is His inspiration that teaches you. Where His inspiration and unction are lacking, it is in vain that you listen to external words." (*Ibid.*, *Tract. In Io. Epist.*, 3, 13)

19. PC, 6.

20. Cf. Guido II the Carthusian, *Letter on the contemplative life (The Ladder of Monks)*, *Twelve meditations*, S.C., 163, pp. 83-101.
21. J. Corbon, *Liturgie de source* (Paris: Cerf, 1980), p. 119. For English transl., cf. note 51 of ch. II.
22. Augustine, *En. In Ps.* 144, 1.
23. J. Corbon, *op. cit.*, p. 146.
24. Augustine, *S.*, 73, 3.
25. *Ibid.*, *De sermone Domini in monte*, I, II, 32. Cf. B.A., 73 B, note 10.
26. Cf. Rom 12:2: "...but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."
27. Augustine, *De Trin.*, XIV, 16, 22.
28. The titles are inspired by those of Chap. III in the first section of LCO.
29. St. Augustine calls the Scriptures "the Letters" (cf. S. 350, 2; *Epist.*, 137, 3; 93;31). Cf. also note 1 of Chapter IV.
30. A.-J. Festugière. *Les Moines d'Orient*, v. 1, *Culture ou Sainteté* (Paris: Cerf, 1961), p. 78.
31. Adaptation of LCO 79.
32. Adaptation of LCO 81 and 82.
33. Adaptation of LCO 87 and 88.

## CHAPTER IV: WORK (LCM 103-110)

### A. TEXT

*(The text of Constitutions 103-110, with its endnotes, has been omitted here.)*

### B: COMMENTARY (5)

#### 1. Work in the monastic tradition (LCM 103)

This is what is evoked by the opening lines of Chapter IV. Work is as ancient as monasticism. When St. Augustine, shortly after his conversion, wrote his book of apologetics, *The Customs of the Catholic Church*, he mentioned this reality and, speaking of the monks of Rome, remarked that they were people who earned their living by their work in the manner of Orientals (6); which means that it was commonly known that the monks of the East lived by their work.

It was first among the Desert Fathers that we find, not a teaching but a well-known practice of work. Work was one of the elements of the life. In St. Benedict there is a chapter on work which is materially important because it organizes the horarium, but without any doctrinal or spiritual consideration of work. It is at the level of practice, not theory: "The brothers are truly monks when they live by the work of their hands, after the example of our Fathers and the Apostles." (7)

In the West, the one who was most concerned with the theory of monastic work was St. Augustine, with his treatise, *The Work of Monks*, written in answer to the consultation of his colleague, the Bishop of Carthage, who had monks in his diocese who did not wish to work and were justifying their way of life.(8)

Following this we do not find any systematic treatise; and in certain forms of monastic life there was even a practical collapse of this value. At Cluny, in the ninth and tenth centuries, the monks did not work, and returned to the classic division in antiquity: the lords who fought and hunted, the people who worked, and the monks who prayed. With Cîteaux, in the twelfth century, the significance of work was restored.

For women, there are no documents [about work]. There is in fact very little feminine monastic literature. Hence the interest of the text from the *Constitutions of St. Sixtus*. It is a precious piece of our tradition.”

The introduction of n. 103 is prudent and does not attribute this text to St. Dominic, for it is not known whether the Sisters may have had this text before St. Dominic’s reform.

#### **a. Points of insistence on this monastic tradition regarding work**

##### ***Work is an apostolic value***

It is taught by the Apostles.(9) Cf. 2 Thes 3:10: "If anyone will not work, let him not eat," quoted in n. 2 of the text of St. Sixtus.

The role of this text was determining for the Desert Fathers: this shows the very strong link from the beginning between the monastic life in the desert and the Word of God.

This is important if we would not reduce Christian monasticism from the beginning to a common religious need: monks of other religions worked; but for the Desert Fathers, there was a reference to Scripture. There was also the example of St. Paul.(10)

##### ***Work is considered as a remedy for idleness* (11)**

This is a reflection which we find strongly confirmed among the Fathers, and which is taken up in the text of St. Sixtus. We find it also in the *Rule of St. Benedict* which treats in the same chapter of manual work and of reading (to show that the monk who, on Sundays, is caught napping over his book, would do better to go and work!).

The words "leisure" and "idleness" have a sense at once positive and pejorative. The fact that work is prescribed for those who make profession of perpetual prayer, and that its obligation is insisted upon, throws light on the concept of prayer. Since work was prescribed, with all that was involved in equipment and attention, this means that it was considered normal that prayer should not be a continual activity, even though one’s attention was fixed on God. Cf. Cassian:

There was a brother by the name of Simeon, for whom we had a lively affection. He came from Italy and did not know a word of Greek. One of the ancients wanted to do him an act of charity, as they did for strangers. But he wanted it to seem as if he were paying a debt. He inquired why Simeon remained idle in his cell, thinking he would not be able

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” Ed. Note: The author included a helpful footnote for LCM 103:3, elaborating on its footnote 37. I include it here:

“*Constitutions de saint Sixte*, ch. XX. It is a pity not to have brought out, in the text of our Constitutions, the link between work and unanimity which is shown in the *Rule of St. Augustine*. It is said that the rich become workers (*laboriosi*) (*Rule*, III, 4); that is, that they work with their hands (cf. Augustine, *De op. Monach.*, 25, 33). In the monastery, since no one possesses anything, manual work is done by all, taking into account each one’s capacity. The wealthy as well as the poor share in the benefits of the works of their hands and ask for what they need from the common store. (*Ibid.*, 25, 32) Thanks to work, former social differences are abolished and the community can live a life of true unanimity, applied even to their material lifestyle.”



to remain long, as much because of the daydreams engendered by idleness as because of the want of indispensable things. Was it not true enough that no one could bear the temptations of solitude unless he consented to earn his living by the work of his hands? Simeon replied that he would like very much to work but for all that he felt incapable of it. "My only skill is the copying of books. But do you, in Egypt, have need of a book written in Latin?" The old man made this the pretext for carrying out his work of charity. "See what an opportunity God has placed in my way! I have been looking for a long time for someone who could copy out the works of the Apostle in Latin, for I have a brother in the army who knows Latin very well, and to whom I should like to send these Scriptures." Simeon joyfully accepted this offer as if it had been made him by God Himself. Yet the happier of the two was the old man, to be able to profit by this pretext to carry out the act of charity he had been thinking about. He received the manuscript and buried it; but even so, he was helping the monk to make a living.(12)

In this tale the old man, because of his own work, had the means to help another not to remain idle. It is an example of work for work's sake, since the result was of no use.

### ***One of the reasons for working manually is not to be a burden to anyone***

This is important for the situation of monks in relation to the Christian community. Cf. St. Augustine: "They are not a burden to anyone, for in the manner of the Orientals and according to the authority of the apostles, they work with their hands." (13) This was an original injunction at a time when many Christians did not do manual work.

"Outside of the category of monks who, according to the precept of the Apostle, work with their hands, almost all the members of the human race look to the charity of another, not only those who glory in living upon the wealth of their parents, the work of servants, or the fruit of their domains, but kings themselves owe their upkeep to alms – taxes!" (14) Monks gave a lesson to Christians!

This reveals an interesting relationship between life consecrated to prayer and the Christian community. If a history of monastic economy were made, we would see that the economic balance of monasteries through the centuries found an explanation within the Christian community; and this was part of a concept of Christians, that they ought to help support those who assumed, in their place, the office of prayer.

Jacques Leclercq shows how all of medieval society converged upon the leisure of monks: prayer was the summit of an entire economic activity which, in its very functioning, recognized this fact about prayer and integrated it. Currently, the transformation of society is such that this understanding of prayer no longer exists and therefore contemplative leisure is not integrated in it.

It was part of the primitive monastic ideal not to be a burden to anyone.

### ***Labor – work. This word evokes the difficulty one may experience***

All that is said of labor, in the language of monks, includes not only manual labor but the overall aspect of effort and of the harshness of life, in order that prayer and fraternal life may be based on something strong.

It refers to the entire effort of asceticism, combat, struggle, in overcoming difficulties, mastering one's body, energy and strength.

For us too, all the constraints and difficulties implied by work should be accepted in this spirit, which presupposes in a broader way that the ascetical aspect, the austere aspect of our life, has not disappeared.

Cassian connects work in its painful aspect with humility of heart: whoever enters a monastery "should submit to work and difficulties. He will earn his daily bread, according to the precept of the Apostle, by the work of his hands, in such a way as to suffice for his own needs and those of guests. This is the way to forget the feasts and delicacies of his former life and to acquire, through penitential work, humility of heart." (15)

### ***The imitation of Christ***

This point is less traditional, but is found in certain sources. In Theodore the Studite (beginning of the eleventh century), for whom the model of the monk is Jesus the Servant, the whole ideal is obedience (washing of feet, etc.). In this perspective, since work is a service, it is magnified. This idea converts easily into: work is what makes our life angelic, for the function of angels is to serve. (16)

We do not find anything about imitating Christ at Nazareth: this is a modern concept. We are looking at the parallel development of dogma and of the living out of Gospel values. In the measure in which religious life is the fruit of the lived Gospel, we suddenly come to realize that over the course of centuries some Gospel values that were never articulated have become a way of life.

In the text of St. Sixtus two other biblical texts are quoted which are not found in monastic literature: Gen 3:19 – a text which outlines a teaching on work and the human condition, a link between work and subsistence; and in Ps 127:2 – the beginnings of the theme of work and joy.

## **2. A contemporary view of work (LCM 104-105)**

The evolution of society since the industrial revolution has modified man's view of his condition and of work. Of set purpose, the Constitutions have not developed a mystique of work too far.

### **a. The religious view of work (LCM 104)**

We do not say that the sisters, through their work, achieve creation – this is disproportionate to monastic work – but simply that they fulfill the Creator's plan: that men and women should work.

"Associated with the work of the Redeemer": this is the other aspect, all that work implies in the way of hardship, its painful character. To work as a Christian is to take on work as a share in the Passion of the Lord.

### **b. Work fosters the development of personality (LCM 105:I)**

Human beings need to do something in order to be. Work gives this balance. A certain number of problems arise whenever there is not enough "doing" in life, so that the overall balance risks being thrown off. It is the search for the Kingdom of God which brings unity into life.

It is good for work to be absorbing; but it is less advantageous when preoccupation with it continues afterwards.

### **c. Connection between work and the common good – charity (LCM 105:II)**

*(Ed. Note: Sister offers no commentary on this section.)*

#### **d. Work a sharing in the human condition (LCM 105:III)**

Work is a value, but we should not pursue it exclusively. It can be counterproductive to the kind of work proper to monasteries, which is the living of the life. It is important to note that the second sentence in this paragraph balances the first.

There is a reference here to *Gaudium et spes* (67,2). The work being discussed in *Gaudium et spes* is the work of our century in its most sophisticated forms, which is the reason for its exaltation. For this reason, these texts have not been used in the Constitutions, because the work of the nuns is on a far more modest scale.

*Gaudium et spes* says that the Christian mission is to give human work its true significance. Now it is the Beatitudes that give it its true meaning. The condition of the monasteries, within the mission of the Church, in regard to work, is to manifest by way of a certain 'scandal' that there are other values besides work. We do not need to live as parasites, but we should not fear scandalizing others by maintaining a mediocre organization from the point of view of intense productivity.

#### **3. Work and the future of monastic life (LCM 106-110)**

Each monastery has its own problems in the organization of its work: division of tasks, taking care that work does not become the most important element, commanding all else, etc.

The question is: will the present realities of the contemporary economy, and its evolution, one day drive the monasteries to a new kind of work?

Note well LCM 106:II: Intellectual work is henceforth opened to the nuns equally with manual work.

LCM 109 stresses confidence in divine providence (cf. Mt 6:25, cited in *PC* 13).

### **NOTES TO CHAPTER IV**

(Note numbers 1 through 4 pertained to the omitted texts of LCM.)

5. A. Duval, conference given at Lourdes, 1972. The notes have been added.
6. Augustine, *De mor. Eccl.*, I, 33, 70.
7. *Rule of St. Benedict*, XLVIII.
8. Augustine, *De op. Monach.*, I, 1-2.
9. Augustine, *De op. Monach.*, I, 1-2; Cassian, *Inst.*, 5; X, 8-16; *Rule of St. Benedict*.
10. Augustine, *De op. Monach.*, III, 4.
11. "Idleness is the enemy of the soul. The brothers should therefore devote certain hours to manual work and others to holy reading" (*Rule of St. Benedict*, XLVIII); cf. Cassian, *Inst.*, X, 5-22.
12. Cassian, *Inst.*, V, 39.
13. Augustine, *De mor. eccl.*, I, 33, 70.
14. Cassian, *Coll.*, XXIV, 12.
15. Cassian, *Inst.*, II, 3.
16. J. Leroy, "Saint Théodore Studite," in *Théologie de la vie monastique, Etudes sur la tradition patristique* (Aubier, 1961), pp. 434-436.

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## BOOK REVIEWS



### SISTERS IN CRISIS<sup>1</sup>

by Ann Carey, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1997, 367 pages, paperback.

The subtitle of this documentary, *The Tragic Unraveling of Women's Religious Communities*, whets the appetite. We have all seen a bit, heard more, and may have suspected the worst about the current situation of "Sisters in crisis" across the country. Now, we think, we will get at the truth.

And get at the truth we do, in this fine-tuned, careful assessment of the present state of active religious Congregations of Sisters in the United States. Carey, wife, mother and journalist who reveres the Sisters who taught her in school, gives a brief glance at "nuns the way we used to know them," that is, in the first half of this century, and then moves swiftly forward to focus on what happened in the sixties and on to tomorrow and the day after.

History has much to tell us about the development of religious life in this country. Where did the Sisters come from? What were their roots, their goals, their *raison d'être*? These matters are competently covered in the early chapters of the book, and prepare us for the main section dealing with the dramatic sweep of renewal ushered in by Vatican Council II.

There are two kinds of Sisters today, Carey says. Eschewing unattractive and overused formulas, she calls them "change-oriented" and "traditional." They have emerged out of Sisters' contrasting reactions to the urgings of Vatican II for an updating of religious life, and their contrasting efforts to implement suggestions for this renewal.

Why two camps? Carey describes how information filtered through leadership groups to the ranks of the sisterhood in America. Facts were not always clearly identified, and conclusions proliferated faster than the Sisters, totally absorbed in living their apostolic life to the hilt, could manage to catch them. Hence there was a great deal of confusion, and this worked its way into the media and out again to the general public. So we had confusion on all sides about Catholic Sisters in America.

Why did some Sisters suddenly appear in lay clothes, live alone or in small groups in apartments, and take jobs in the secular marketplace, while others remained in their convents valiantly attempting to carry on a lifelong mission of teaching, or struggled against enormous odds to continue staffing hospitals and nursing homes, in the face of their dwindling personnel? Carey explains how within various Sisters' Congregations leadership groups were formed to implement Vatican II, and how these groups amalgamated into a national spearhead linked directly with the Roman Curia and purporting to represent all the individual Sisters in the country. Through the central leadership, changes in lifestyle, common life, community prayer, and common goals of mission were rapidly effected, despite the reluctance and bewilderment of many sisters at the grass roots level.

The obvious question occurs: how is it that Rome backed the action of the leadership groups if their understanding of the Church's ideal of renewal was less than accurate? But did Rome do this? What part did American bishops play in the denouement of religious life as once known in this country? Carey records facts, correspondence, reports, counter-reports, and minutes of meetings with scientific skill and competence. She shows how the picture changed almost from day to day,

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<sup>1</sup> *Sisters in Crisis* and *Sisters in Arms* are reprinted with permission of the *National Catholic Register*.

as thousands of Sisters attempted to come to grips with renewal in the midst of an unraveling concept. With the formation of other national leadership groups of Sisters, confusion reached its climax.

We are truly indebted to the author for her objective, professional, and yet sensitive approach to the phenomenon of the shifting religious scene. Basically, she is looking at people – religious sisters – with their conflicting ideals, hopes, and undertakings. Their vocation/mission is a priceless element of our Catholic life, and in this book it is treated with respect, empathy, and keen insight. The author's penetrating perceptions, sparked with a gentle humor at times, broaden into understanding rather than sharpen into criticism

We sometimes tend to chalk up crises to the human condition, and let it go at that. But crisis is *not* the human condition. When he created us, God "saw that it was good". We need to see religious life from his perspective and look to the restoration of its original splendor – the splendor of truth. What is the truth of religious life? What is it meant to be today?

The *facts* about Sisters in crisis are not the whole truth, only a part. If we want the whole truth, we need to check the sources, and move from Church-mystery to the mystery dimension of religious community. These words of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life seem to encapsulate it: "[A] religious community is not simply a collection of Christians in search of personal perfection. Much more deeply, it is a participation in and qualified witness to the Church-mystery.... Religious community, in its structure, motivations, and distinguishing values, makes publicly visible and continually perceptible the gift of fraternity given by Christ to the whole Church."

This is the tenor of the closing section of Carey's book, in which she expresses hope for the future of religious life in the United States. Quoting Pope John Paul II in *Vita consecrata*, she writes: "Sad situations of crisis invite consecrated persons courageously to proclaim their faith in Christ's death and resurrection, that they may become a visible sign of the passage of death to life." *From death to life*: this is the path marked out for Sisters in crisis, for all religious, who are and always will be at the heart of the Church. Carey has provided a valuable analysis, which could well be used in the gathering together and reworking of unraveled threads, until they are all once more "fast knit to Christ."

Sr. Mary Thomas, O.P.  
Buffalo, NY



## **SISTERS IN ARMS: CATHOLIC NUNS THROUGH TWO MILLENNIA**

by Jo Ann Kay McNamara, Harvard University Press, 1998, 751 pages, \$18.95, paperback.

Nuns seem to be an 'in' topic these days, judging from the number of books being served up currently for the inquiring public. As the number of religious women decreases, talk about them proliferates.

In the front ranks, if for no other reason than its impressive size, Professor McNamara's contribution to the pile takes a prominent position. Her seven hundred and fifty-page panorama of nuns through the millennia is like a medieval tale portrayed in a series of hanging tapestries, intricate, colorful, rich in detail, and pleasingly accented with bright wit in the telling. Or to update the assessment, perhaps

we should speak of the technological precision of an account which includes a near to infinite number of incidents and personalities crisscrossing the centuries at jet speed to leave us breathless on the doorstep of A.D. 2000.

This is a well crafted treatment of the historical, psychological, and sociological elements which go to make up the fascinating mix of motivation and praxis to be found in a history of this kind. There is much to be said for the evident scholarship behind such an extended effort, the persevering research that obviously went into such a challenging project, and the bonus of a lively style which keeps the reader turning the pages. Admittedly, the book is proposed as a historical overview, driven by an authentic feminist agenda. A few quotes at random will illustrate this.

The leaders [of the Jerusalem community, in Acts] could have been resisting the recruitment of additional women, hoping to restrict the group to the original followers of Jesus ... already the outlines of a male priesthood were appearing with the inevitable result of limiting the usefulness of women. (p. 17).

Women [of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century], however admirable or even masculine, were condemned by virtue of their gender to a secondary state from which no degree of sanctity would lift them. (p. 86).

The reformation and regulation of female communities [in the 9<sup>th</sup> century] was carried out by men who made no discernible effort to consult the women concerned. (p. 150-151).

The substitution of the mass [sic] for the gender inclusive chant [at the time of the Cluniac reform] was but a single step in the redefinition of the church as a body of professional male clergy encompassing monks but not nuns. (p. 209).

The clergy [of the high Middle Ages] accepted the burden of the *cura mulierum* grudgingly, with the proviso that the women be self-sufficient and not drain resources needed for the church's more important responsibilities. Men agreed that women needed less material wealth than men and that self-mortification was especially becoming to the vainer sex. (p. 263).

Immoral priests [in the Middle Ages] could still deliver good sacraments, but nuns had to be personally holy to keep their patrons [benefactors]. (p. 283).

Neither do they [Sisters in professional careers] wish to be confined by that separate, complementary feminine nature to which Pope John Paul II clings in his recent efforts to put the female genie back into her bottle. (p. 630).

The church's own monolithic face cracked as various factions debated its role in the late twentieth-century world. (p. 631).

We have, therefore, in *Sisters in Arms*, a detailed history of nuns as seen through a feminist prism. While such a slant mars the objectivity and credibility of the story, a more serious flaw is the absence of a complete picture. The "truth" thus becomes the enemy of the whole truth.

Professor. McNamara tells us in her Preface that she has become, like Voltaire, a secular humanist. May we pose the possibility that this is not enough? So much has been given: could we not have hoped for more? So many pages on the nuns, but basically there is not a clue as to who they really are. Secular humanism lowers the ceiling to the point where we are left gasping for air.

In recent decades popes and theologians have made serious and responsible efforts to define the evolving concept of consecrated life in contemporary terms. Catholics would do well to open read these documents and explore them in depth, even as they retain the valued lessons of the past. In



their study, they can indeed profit by the historical background which Professor. McNamara offers, with the caveat that it is only a part, and a small part, of the whole picture.

Religious life is not, in fact, a purely natural phenomenon. Neither are nuns. Their venture cannot be pursued on purely natural terms. Nor can it be understood or evaluated by purely natural criteria. To be specific, no man or woman can choose the religious life as a vocation. God does the choosing. The man or woman is chosen. The Lord made this point quite simply to his apostles: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Truth's word remains true through the millennia, and beyond. A vocation is a wonderful work of God. It is best understood from His point of view. A study that overlooks this is like a body without a soul.

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## **WITNESS TO HOPE: THE BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN PAUL II**

by George Weigel, Cliff Street Books, 1999, 991 pages, sewn hardcover, \$35.00.

A number of biographies of John Paul II have been written. We would have been poorer without some, one by Mieczslaw Malinski, another by John Szostak, a third by Jerzy Kluger, for example. Many of the biographies now cover familiar territory. Some seem to be designed as souvenirs, for it is clear that Our Holy Father cannot live much longer.

It will be hard to evaluate the effects of this papacy on the Church and the world. Finding a suitable biographer to capture the depth and scope of this pontificate is very difficult. Pope Paul VI was captured in the words of Jean Guitton. Weigel has accomplished this in the case of John Paul II. A theologian himself, he grasps and relates the theological impact of the teaching of John Paul II in its historical setting. In a vivid and ever interesting style, he tries to pierce the meaning of the pontificate of John Paul II. Weigel, in his inimitable style, speaks best for himself:

He survives an assassination attempt, redefines the Catholic Church's relationship with Judaism, invites Orthodox and Protestant Christians to help imagine a papacy that could serve the needs of all Christians, preaches to Muslim teenagers in a packed stadium in Casablanca, and describes marital intimacy as an icon of the interior life of the triune God. After he faces a series of medical difficulties, the world media pronounce him a dying, if heroic, has been. Within the next six months he publishes an international bestseller translated into forty languages, gathers the largest crowd in human history on the least Christian continent in the world, urges the Church to cleanse its conscience on the edge of the next millennium, and almost single-handedly changes the course of a major international meeting on population issues. Addressing the United Nations in 1995, he defends the universality of human rights and describes himself as a "witness to hope" at the end of a century of unprecedented wickedness. Two days later, the irrepressible pontiff does a credible imitation of Jack Benny during Mass in Central Park, and the cynical New York Press loves it. (pp.3-4)

True, but it is hard to find anyone who can record this remarkable state of things with such literary style and clarity. Weigel does it, and his "understanding from the inside" continues throughout the book, all of which is worth reading. So much has happened during this pontificate that it will be

useful to have this summary of some of the masterworks of John Paul II and the theological impact in the historical setting.

Among the insights I particularly treasure is the description of *Mulieris Dignitatem*. Some think it to be among the conservative statements of Our Holy Father, but Weigel points out some striking innovations. There is a "Petrine profile" of the Church, but more fundamental is the "Marian profile," the Church of the disciples. The Marian profile is the preeminent one and richer in meaning. In this Our Holy Father is following the lead of Fr. Von Balthasar who proposed several profiles of the Church. Discipleship comes before authority and sanctity before power. "This was not Mariology in the service of traditionalism. This was Mariology demolishing the last vestiges of the idea of the Church-as-absolute-monarchy." (p.577) That needed doing: the Pope did it.

One can trace strong influences of Von Balthasar in the thinking of John Paul II. There may be a number of doctoral dissertations yet to come on that subject.

We hear reports of papal travels to various continents. Plainly there is an impact on the political climate during these visits. Weigel's account shows that some very good, but fundamentally disrupting (from the point of view of dictators) effects were consciously planned during the papal visits. Fear and isolation of various groupings in society keep sectors of society apart from each other. This was true in Poland, in Chile, and elsewhere. One goal of the Chilean pilgrimage was to "reconquer the streets." Streets had been places of riots and beatings. They were given a new meaning as places where Chileans prayed together. The papal Mass venues were deliberately chosen to mix various groupings of people as they had not been mixed for years. This was true in Poland, too. Communism deliberately fosters mistrust between groupings in society, but the papal visit was intended to, and had the effect of, creating a climate of trust in society.

*Veritatis Splendor* is one of the gems of this papacy. Weigel discusses the theological contents of this encyclical but has, in addition, some interesting information about its drafting. It is said that popes have other people write their encyclicals. I am not sure how true this is, but there were papal commissions involved in preparing this text. In addition, the Pope consulted with bishops and theologians around the world. Weigel traced the influence of Servais Pinckaers, O.P., Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Tadeusz Styczeń, SDS, Andrezej Szostek, MIC, and Georges Cottier, O.P. It is, however, truly and profoundly the work of Our Holy Father. There are not many persons who are well enough informed about theology and write accessible books in which one can discover information like this. This is one of the joys of this book. In this encyclical, John Paul II "tried to reconnect freedom to the good of human flourishing" (p.694).

Weigel is thoroughly aware of the criticisms leveled against John Paul II by different sectors in the Church and society. A good discussion of these can be found in the final chapter of the book. Probably most of the critical observations of Weigel lie in this section: for example, "The fact remains, though, that John Paul II has not invested significant, sustained energy in ensuring that his vision of an evangelically assertive, culture-forming Church of disciples is understood and shared throughout the various levels of the Roman bureaucracy" (p.855). This is probably true, but the papal curia is legendarily impervious to papal influence. It seems to be a tradition.

The book concludes observing that John Paul II helped to demonstrate that faith can transform the world and restore a "spiritual dimension to a history that had become flat, stale, and, as a consequence, brutal" (p.804).

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